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RECLAIMING RHETORICAL INTERSECTIONALITY: FROM SILENCE TO  
PARRHESIA AND ATTUNED LISTENING

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Tahirah Joyce Duncan Walker

May 2019

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Tahirah Joyce Duncan Walker

2019

RECLAIMING RHETORICAL INTERSECTIONALITY: FROM SILENCE TO  
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By

Tahirah Joyce Duncan Walker

Approved March 15, 2019

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## ABSTRACT

# RECLAIMING RHETORICAL INTERSECTIONALITY: FROM SILENCE TO PARRHESIA AND ATTUNED LISTENING

By

Tahirah Joyce Duncan Walker

May 2019

Dissertation supervised by Professor Pat Arneson, PhD

Intersectionality is a term applied by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in the late 1980s to a social experience. A person experiences intersectionality when different aspects of her identity converge in a way that causes uniquely amplified marginalization or oppression. The classic three identities that produce intersectionality experiences in the United States are race, gender, and class, making poor women of color the central figures of intersectionality study. Crenshaw explained that these forces take three main forms: structural, political and representational (“Mapping the Margins” 1243).

Intersectionality has always been rhetorical. Structural, political and representational intersectionality are supported in language. The power of language influences our everyday actions. Joining Crenshaw are communication scholars Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston who recognize that intersectionality is

enacted in language. In exclusionary rhetorical frames, people perform language in a series of systematic techniques that do not require thought and action. Structural, political, and representational intersectionalities are formed by an exclusionary construction of rhetoric that supports the notion that some people are worthy of speaking into existence the world and some people are not. One of communication scholarship characteristics is that we are attentive to context. For example, when one uses the phrase “our feminism will be intersectional” it is important to consider that intersectional is not the same as diverse or multicultural. In my project, I document the reclaiming of rhetorical intersectionality by women of color and explored the nature of this reclamation.

## DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my daughters Isis, Bilquisu, and Hajara for illuminating every corner of my work and giving me the constant reminders of why it matters. To my nieces Reina, Mimi, Tori, Zahirah, Majesty, Hannah, Kupcake, and Dodi: may the intersection always uplift you. And most of all to my wonder of a mother who began this journey with me in life but carries me over the finish line in spirit - may you fly forever free. Mommy, our intersection is unbroken; it's power unmatched. Thank you for teaching me the meaning of Stevie Wonder's words "true love asks for nothing; her acceptance is the way we pay."

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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## CHAPTER ONE:

### AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a term used to describe an experience. This experience is a social one. A person experiences intersectionality when different aspects of her identity converge in a way that causes uniquely amplified marginalization or oppression. The classic three identities that are found to produce intersectionality experiences in the United States are race, gender, and class, making the poor woman of color the central figure of intersectionality study. Identity constructs that contribute to intersectionality might also include sexuality, educational background or country of origin. If intersectionality were represented on a family tree, that tree would have roots of struggle in the social constructs of race, gender and class and other identity constructs that are built to delineate privilege in our society. Narratives of those struggles intertwined and grew into one strong tree that gave rise to scholars and activists who have worked on issues of racial, economic and misogynist oppression for centuries. Many of these scholars and activists have contributed so much that they now have their own branches. The branches include the theoretical work and activism of Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Toni Cade Bambara, Patricia Hill Collins, Paula Giddings, Gloria Hull, Cherie Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldua, and Angela Davis. The branch instituted by legal scholar and critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw guides this project. Crenshaw was the first person to discuss the convergence using the term intersectionality. Her definitions of intersectionality as occurring in structural, political and representational forms are the ones used to inform this study. These three forms are all rhetorical in the sense that they are enacted or reinforced in language. This is based on a construction of rhetoric defined as language that is

accessed in the public spheres. Structural, political, and representational intersectionality get their rhetorical power exclusion and marginalization of people.

In this project, I am looking at a theory of intersectionality that gets its rhetorical power from inclusion, and public sphere that opens space for building and listening to discourse rather than pushing it to the margins. This “rhetorical” intersectionality takes power back from the structural, political, and representational intersectionality forms through rhetorical communicative action. In this work, I look particularly at this form of intersectionality having features of addressing silence, practicing *parrhesia*, and listening. I identify the work of communication scholars Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater and Marsha Houston as three of many theorists whose work shapes our appraisals of these features of intersectionality. I propose that examining these theorists’ work provides a valuable view of communication’s work to turn intersectionality over and use its power to uplift rather than oppress people. I propose that Allen, Atwater and Houston are joined by others whose educating and performing of this uplifting work comes together to establish a cohesive articulation of a theory of rhetorical intersectionality. My research question is what is rhetorical intersectionality?

Intersectionality has always been rhetorical. Structural, political and representational intersectionality have been supported by language. Language as a manner of influencing our everyday actions is power. In his landmark work *The Language of Oppression*, Haig Bosmajian wrote as an introductory statement that “The power which comes from names and naming is related directly to the power to define others – individuals, races, sexes, ethnic groups” (i). Bosmajian’s book examined the language of anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany and looks at how propaganda was used rhetorically to ostracize and ultimately commit genocide against Jews. He cited Ernst Cassirer and emphasizes that this had to be done first by changing the function of

language so that descriptions of things or relations of things are no longer important but rather what is important is the effect produced when words are said. Cassirer called these magic words. Nazi propaganda often referred to Jews as “Bolshevik poison”, “bacillus” or “Red Dragon” (a reference to the devil). The “magic” in the propaganda was an association with evil and a large-scale mental portrait of Jews as enemies of life itself. Bosmajian also demonstrates how this was done in the United States to implement institutional racism, displacement of Native Americans, sexism, and war. The driving point is that rhetorical power is consistently connected to how social injustice and subjugation are operationalized. Allen, Atwater, Crenshaw and Houston recognize that intersectionality is enacted in language as well. Structural, political and representational intersectionality are oppressive forces enacted in rhetoric. However, they function in a definition of rhetoric that is exclusionary and operates in a sedimented techné.

In exclusionary rhetorical frames, people perform language in a series of systematic techniques that do not require thought and action. Structural, political and representational intersectionality are formed by an exclusionary construction of rhetoric that supports the notion that some people are worthy of speaking into existence the world and some people are not. The inequality is performed and re-performed and can be traced through the history of the public sphere in Western societies. Scholars and activists have at many turns recognized this way of rhetoric and asked for more thought, more action, and more privileging of the human experience. Just as we began to question the exclusionary constructions of rhetoric (Glenn) as translated into Machiavellian manifestations of the public sphere and control of it, scholars and activists are now questioning these intersectionality manifestations. In the past century, scholars have opened constructions of rhetoric so that they are inclusive not exclusionary. This form of rhetorical intersectionality opens the idea of the public sphere so that it is plural and fluid (Hauser) rather

than singular and static with a philosopher king at its head as described by Plato. We have sought a new rhetoric and along with it a new intersectionality. This new intersectionality is rhetorical, too.

### Defining Rhetorical Intersectionality and Distinguishing it from Other Forms

The Crenshaw branch of intersectionality is defined by structural, political and representational forms. Each of these is rhetorical in and of itself as the forms are enacted in language. I am proposing a new form on the Crenshaw branch that is inclusive, enlarging, and based on what Hauser calls a thick moral vernacular. While the other forms are rhetorical, this form is a more accurately and authentically rhetorical one that is in line with a definition of rhetoric that truly embodies the contemporary reticulate nature of public spheres. It is reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality. Structural, political and representational intersectionality are rhetorically exclusionary. They work to oppress people with multiple marginalized identities by limiting possibilities, eliminating narratives, and freezing identity constructs in place. Rhetorically, they rest on the “I-It” communication model. Reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality works to uplift people who have multiple marginalized identities by inviting scholars and activists to expand possibilities within structures. Reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality explores the expansion of narratives. It does not propose to do this by ignoring old meta-narratives that still have power such as the narrative of racism. Rather, reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality interrogates meta-narratives and proposes ways to acknowledge and examine their tentacles in vernacular narratives. For instance, reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality does not suggest that the United States has become a post-racial society or that it is possible to not see color when we engage narratives. Instead, reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality celebrates the joy experienced by many who recognized a victory over racism when an African-American president was elected and asks

how we turn that celebration into a movement that is willing to address a policing system that is plagued by shooting unarmed Black people. It is this reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality that makes sure we don't forget the names of people who lost their lives to this phenomenon and makes a point of challenging the poor attention we pay to those names when they are the names of women. Reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality broke the silence surrounding this issue with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality then courageously spoke truth in the face notions that BLM did not acknowledge the mattering of all lives or that it somehow missed the mattering of so-called blue (police) lives. Reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality also spoke the truth as over and over the reports of people being murdered by police left out women experiencing this violence by initiating a new campaign called "Say Her Name" to honor and remember the deaths of unarmed women of color in law enforcement confrontations. Reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality uses rhetorical listening and an ethics of attunement. This form of intersectionality is practiced by people who both overcame the older forms of intersectionality and use reclamation to create new opportunities for listening to stories of women who have been marginalized. This new reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality crosses the threshold of academic into everyday ordinary life and resists applying the theoretical to communities in research or positing communities as subjects but rather co-constructs theory with communities with initiatives and activism that posits them as actors and agents of change. Rhetorical intersectionality is the ability to uplift and make justice in marginalized communities through (1) examination and breaking of silence, (2) practice of *parrhesia*, and (3) attuned listening. Rhetorical intersectionality as I conceive this idea is an area of communication study that is interdisciplinary and allows for shared discursive power.

This phenomenon of lifting other members of the intersection up and inviting people who may not experience intersectionality to come and stand with us is rhetoric as inclusion. The silence attending and breaking; the courage to take the role of *parrhesiastes*; and the firm establishment of listening in attunement are the hallmarks of this phenomenon and the methods by which we reverse the flow of structural, political and representational intersectionality that is grounded in exclusionary rhetoric and language of oppression. We note silence and break it when it must be broken. We speak truth when we are afraid and have everything to lose because we know that silence in the *kairos* of *parrhesia* will not, in fact, protect us. And we listen. We listen not only for words and techne of an exclusionary rhetorical construct but for timing and action made available by an inclusive construct of rhetoric and public spheres thereby opening the possibilities of breaking newly formed or reconstructed margins. Thus, we have found our definition of rhetorical intersectionality: a rhetoric of inclusion a notion of public spheres that is invitational from the intersection. In this metaphoric intersection where so much traffic can clobber us, we can stand together and disrupt the sedimented structures, politics and representations. In reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality, we can stand together and push.

### The Research Approach to This Study

In my approach to this question, I plan to examine key terms and scholars to map the intersectionality and communication theory involved in this investigation. I will use a hermeneutic approach to literature and experiences that can build knowledge of how we get from intersectionality to rhetorical intersectionality. Revealing rhetorical intersectionality will require the fusion of horizons (Gadamer) so that the different interpretations of communication theories and their relationships to intersectionality can inform the study together. In this study, I hope to establish a research dialogue that explicitly includes autoethnographic components as part of the



hermeneutic circle. As a woman of color, I recognize that interrogating and documenting my own narrative is a valid form of inquiry and a crucial portion of the honesty this subject will require. I am writing despite an incredible series of historical efforts to stamp out my experiences or frame them with a hegemonic gaze (Ellis). My approach to this study is value-centered and story-laden (Bochner). Objectivity is not a method I could purport. I am embedded in this study. I am both shaping and shaped by it.

### Key Terms and Scholars

To map this study, I will define several integral terms. key terms that have emerged in this project and locate them as salient metaphors in rhetorical intersectionality. These terms shape a vocabulary of this reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality. These key terms are offered to further explain the reclamation of rhetorical intersectionality through examining and breaking silence, practicing *parrhesia*, and attuned listening. Adding descriptions that explain how they work is an important component of addressing the vernacular of the vocabulary. Hauser introduces this in his construct of rhetorical models of public spheres. He notes that they demonstrate prevailing codes gathering the force of a vocabulary of motives providing the thick moral vernacular he speaks of in his later work *Prisoners of Conscience* and "even a telos that defines the subject and the community" (123). The telos of rhetorical intersectionality is freedom through reclamation and inclusion in every aspect of examining silence, speaking truth and listening. The thick moral vernacular of that telos hinges on the following terms.

*Ubuntu* - Extended Definition. Rhetorical intersectionality carries forward the South African construct of humanity as being a relative and communicative epistemology. *Ubuntu* means "I am because we are" it is a way of defining one's own existence by the recognition of others and the recognition that their qualities of life are important. This is a theme that can also be connected to

Buber's "I-Thou" and reverberates in King's Letter from a Birmingham jail. Rhetorical intersectionality requires this element of communication theory and philosophy of communication to be significant.

***Race.*** Race is a social construct based on what humans look like on the outside. These are called phenotypes. Phenotypes come from the interaction of genes with the environment. Because those phenotypes generally join genes to the environments where one's ancestors are from, the idea of race is easily misconstrued as genetic. But, historically, it has been used in ways that have nothing to do with genetics (Alexander, Gilroy, Yancy). So, when I say I am Black, it has nothing to do with genetics and in fact like so many other people, I have never actually seen what my DNA tells me about where my ancestors lived. Understanding race requires a historical rhetorical historical viewing. In understanding race as a construct sedimented in gendered contexts, we must look at the origins of the categorization in the United States. Race is a system built to distinguish those who could be capital from those who could be owners (Alexander).

When I say I am Black, I am acknowledging the social position I was born to here in the US. I am acknowledging all the people who are in this with me and I am claiming my history of struggles and successes. Sadly, part of those struggles has been reminding other humans that we do indeed belong to the same species or scientific race. Race is often conflated with other identifiers like nationality, ethnicity and even religion. Being Muslim is increasingly more like the social construct of race in the United States but it is not phenotypic, and most people can easily change that descriptor by deciding to be something else so in that way it is very different from what we generally think of as race. Nationality and ethnicity are also mutable but not nearly so ascriptive as religious affiliation. These histories of race and nationhood are covered

extensively in Nell Painter's *A History of White People* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*.

***People of Color.*** The term “people of color” is connected to race historically as it was originally used to delineate anyone whose ancestry included people who were non-European. In the United States, this would, by and large, have meant people with African ancestry. However, that meaning came to include conflation over time. Generally speaking, when someone uses the term people of color today, that person is referring to someone who does not enjoy the privileges of whiteness in the United States (Painter). Those privileges can be deactivated via a number of vectors. For instance, many people who are from South America may, in fact, have European ancestry but find that they are not given the same socio-cultural privileges in the United States as citizens here who are considered White. This may be enacted by perceived accent or difference in commonly identified last names which effectively can mean that person of color means anyone who does not present as the average White citizen of the United States or an honorary thereof. In a strange twist of rhetorical meaning, it seems color itself is one of many factors that can render a person non-White or a person of color. Other factors might include country of origin (not just continent), accent detection, profession, economic status, perceived assimilation readiness, hair texture, eye color, and a host of other characteristics that are socially constructed to race people. For the purpose of this project, people of color will refer specifically to people who experience the traditional constructs of standing outside White privilege. As that privilege was originally constructed to literally contain people of African descent and literally push out indigenous people here in the United States, people who fall into this category may often be conflated with Black and brown people whether they identify that way or not. This is further codified by the practice in certain societies of offering particular groups of people “honorary

White” status wherein someone of non-European descent could explicitly by law or policy enjoy the privileges of a White person i.e. Japanese people in both the Nazi honorary Aryan system and South Africa’s apartheid system (Braithwaite).

**Class.** There is the lengthy body of literature that iterates class in terms of Western systems of social order from antiquity through modernity. These iterations have grown into crystallized communist representations and capitalist ones. The most common reifications of those ideas are in the expressions of class as a matter of wealth and access to monetary resources in frames of upper, middle and lower classes. Various other idioms point to these as well including proletariat or working class (typically presumed to mean low or lower-middle class), the bourgeoisie, and more recently in Western society, the one percent or ruling class. These notions of economic status seem to spring forth relative to control over means of production or closeness to those means. However, Marx’s theoretical ground cannot fully capture class well enough for the benefit of the project here without the addition of race as an understanding. In the United States, and in many other raced societies, race is a historical foundation of class. The two concepts are intertwined at the dawn of American capitalism where race becomes the means for establishing class through hundreds of years of forced labor. Enslaved Africans’ closeness to the means of production and control of it was structured based on the invention of race designations and systems. We tend to think of race as being a matter of Black and White or varying classifications that mirror distinctions put forth by those categorizations. But race, in the United States, is first and foremost about economic position and was delineated carefully in that manner. The system of economic stratification was propped up on the ownership and usage of people and ownership or use of other human beings was in turn propped up by racial categorizations ranging from the one-drop rule deeming anyone with “Black blood” as being

Black to the octoroon and quadroon designations that identified levels of Blackness and assigned economic and social privileges accordingly. For the purposes of this project which is steeped heavily in United States history and the experiences of people in the post-enslavement eras of the United States, class is inextricably linked to race and poverty is commonly comorbidity of Blackness. Class is raced.

This is not to suggest that there are not people of other races who experience the struggles of the American lower class but rather that the origin of that class is in enslavement and proximity to it. Owners where the upper class and pinnacles of whiteness. The ability to purchase other people was the class and race goal of achievement. The inability to purchase other people was the lower class. As with any system, there are exceptions. White people (many of whom were only considered White in more recent American imaginaries of communities) were owned by other White people and Black people were sometimes owners of other Black people. But the impulse was to normalize the notion that to be enslaved, lower class or economically powerless was synonymous with Blackness and in fact a predisposition (Alexander).

**Gender.** Gender, like race and class, is also a social construct. Gender is the performance of a role or set of roles that a society deems appropriate for the assignment one holds. Simone de Beauvoir unpacks this in her magnum opus, *The Second Sex* declaring “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (283). As with the binaries of Black and White, gender has often been represented in dual foci of male or female. Like the phenotype relationship to race, gender has a relationship to sex and then genital anatomy observed at birth. Once the observation of the sex is noted at birth, many families begin to delineate roles for a child based on that observation. There are cases in which the observation is incomplete or wrong such as the guevedoces of The Dominican Republic who were assigned the sex of female at birth and then developed penises at

about twelve years of age (Rollins), hijras of South Asia many of whom are intersex (Roy), and the case of the 19th century French intersex person (previously called hermaphrodite) Herculine Barbin whose memoirs were translated and published by Michel Foucault. These cases support a notion of biological sex as less polemically defined than the assignments of binary gender roles would imply. Furthermore, gender as a set of roles has become less polemically defined over time as well. Gender is a performance of those roles. Because those roles have traditionally been separated in terms of public and private lives including the public vs. private aspects of work, inheritance and property ownership, gender roles also have class implications. In the United States, women's class roles have been by proxy of men. The right to change this and enter the public sphere for economic as well as other self-determination reasons was fought for in women's movements documented throughout American history. These movements came to prominence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries during the suffragist movements to gain women's right to vote. The suffragist movement was one informed by and supported by many of the same women who had participated in the abolitionist movement. The experience and legacies of slavery that continued the structural racism of unbearable sharecropping arrangements, Jim Crow laws, and other systems had taught Black women that their gender roles were not socially constructed in the same way that White women's were.

In many ways, gender was raced. The epitome of purity and womanliness were the domain of White women and pitted in direct contradiction to the roles of Black women as being more brutish and not only less womanly or feminine but even less human. As is the case with most constructs, the categorizations exhibit some notable departures from the norm. Indeed, these few and far between departures are what often cause people to miss the dominant structures as they focus on isolations and rare incidents. The system was often built along gender lines. As

it became more and more dangerous and costly to grow human capital by enslaving people in African societies and forcing them to move to the United States, owners began to consider alternatives. The most popular of these was to produce one's own livestock. Relying upon several systems of reproduction assurance, owners needed categorizations to make clear distinctions in livestock and roles in the means of production. Gender offered this at many levels of the system.

This often persists today in perceptions of womanhood that are based in the “fineness” of northern European idealism wherein femininity (and thus beauty) is defined in relationship to whiteness. Gender is a site of socio-economic oppression amplified and multiplied by factors that stem from racialization and colorism. Gender is raced.

***Feminism.*** An impulse to do something about the socio-economic inequality experienced by women because of repressive ideas of gender roles and the idea of a woman's place is often referred to as feminism. However, not all feminism has acknowledged the inequality of gender as a raced social construct. The term feminism refers to the general idea that the gender roles of women and men (assigned via physical observations or biological imperatives) are equally entitled to human rights. This is put forth extensively in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Feminism is generally applied as a term describing the suffrage movements discussed above, though the term, attributed to sociologist Charles Fourier may not have been widely used outside of France and England at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. “My own definition is a feminist is a man or a woman who says, yes, there's a problem with gender as it is today and we must fix it, we must do better. All of us, women and men, must do better” (Adichie).

***Womanism.*** The term womanism refers to a movement that embraces some of the principles of feminism but rejects the cultural defaults that tend to go along with its practice and

illustrations. Womanism embraces equality of the sexes but also recognizes a hegemony that is layered by more than sex and gender. Womanism also recognizes and embraces nature as a component of human rights. There are few times in the research on intersectionality wherein a distinction is made between womanist and feminist. However, that this distinction exists and is explored in many of the works referenced here is important to keep in mind while considering the landscape of thoughts and ideas.

***Critical Race Theory.*** Critical Race Theory (CRT) scholars seek to expose race as a fundamental element of injustice in the United States. Such injustice is not only present in highly visible circumstances such as police brutality (Chaney and Robertson; Jeffries and Jeffries) but also in more nuanced circumstances such as corporate hiring and promotion (Rocco). CRT scholars propose that in examinations of injustice, in the United States at least but elsewhere as well, the role of racism must be an assumption, not a question. CRT posits that whiteness is performed and reinforced pervasively in American society and supports not only racial oppression but other forms as well. In this sense, CRT also proposes that challenges to inequity must be done in the space of coalitions and cross-structural activism.

***Minority.*** We generally think of minority as being synonymous with people of color. This is a particularly narrow social view. In terms of population, people of color make up most of the world's population. However, within the context of the United States, people of color have historically made up less of the population than those who are considered White. They have also been in positions of less economic and social power making it easier to push their concerns and representation to the margins of society where they are easily ignored or abused. While the numeric dynamic of this is changing, the power one is not. Many social scientists estimate that by 2050 the U.S. White population will be less than half of the total population making them a



technical minority. However, that trend does not share a positive correlation with the share of wealth and power. Instead, social science predictions indicate that the marginalization will continue (Pew).

***Margin.*** In intersectionality literature, the margin is a metaphoric space along the outskirts of the important text and narrative. The margin is the edge or border. In some contexts, it is an addition to the portion of a thing that is important. To be marginalized means to be relegated to the unimportant space or space where the afterthoughts occur. Marginalization of people suggests that they do not matter to the important parts of society. Intersectionality recognizes this and points out that there are those people who are forced to exist even at the outskirts of the margins, the outermost corners because they are pushed away from the main body by a multiplicity of factors. The African-American feminist scholar bell hooks describes her definition of the margin as follows:

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance—as location of radical openness and possibility...We come to this space through suffering, pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world” (153).

The intersection is a space where marginality is assumed to be finite but is not. There are infinite opportunities to be marginalized which in turn creates infinite opportunities to be unbound and create further space even within the margins. Intersectionality also leaves open infinite opportunities to create community within the margins and push back against the power of the intersecting oppressions. The ability to come together along the margins and create community is nothing short of the ability to create and enact freedom but as Coretta Scott King indicated, this freedom is not to be taken for granted. King explained that freedom requires constant care and

attention and it is up to each generation to re-cognize it, re-construct it and re-member its components. I am a descendant of the Crenshaw generation both intellectually and temporally. I have benefitted from their work both in the academy and in the broader public sphere. The structures that Crenshaw identified as mechanisms of intersectional oppression are still in existence.

***Oppression.*** Oppression is the maintenance of margins, systems, laws, and policies that serve the purpose of continuing historical regimes of power. Oppression is in the way a society works. In the United States, oppression is often enacted along lines of identity that have historically been part of the exclusion from power. This means that systems, laws, and policies are in place to maintain a status quo wherein people who are non-White, non-male and otherwise outside acceptable social orders, are kept from power. In a capitalist society, the end goal of this is primarily economic oppression. This means that the economic positions of undesirables are subjugated by cutting off access to routes of prosperity. This includes property ownership, education, and political participation. Oppression occurs along those lines as well as many others and is expressed in the form of racism, sexism and other systemic identity-based subjugation in order to enforce classism.

***Discrimination.*** When people make individualized decisions that perpetuate and sustain the systems described above, this is defined as discrimination. The existence of policies at mortgage companies and municipalities that allowed for minority communities to be “redlined” wherein neighborhoods of color were systemically rated lower in value than White ones is an example of a system of oppression. A realtor’s decision to prevent Black homebuyers from making bids on homes in certain communities or of property owners to refuse sale to Black buyers is an example of discriminatory practice within a system of oppression.

***Sankofa.*** Rhetorical intersectionality is guided by *sankofa*, a West African principle often represented by a bird with an egg in its mouth looking backward. The idea of *sankofa* is that in attending the past and analyzing it, we must also put it to work in caring for our future (Asante and Mazama, Atwater, Karenga). Crenshaw's work bears the trait of *sankofa*. She considers a future that includes historical ground in her questions "So what is the trajectory that leads to the future that we say we want, one in which old patterns of racial exclusion? How do we not only reclaim yesterday's future but make it even brighter?" ("Reclaiming Yesterday's Future" 4). In this recognition of traits that resist the oppressive characteristics of structural, political and representational intersectionality, Crenshaw invites us to recall the dreams and hopes communicated by those who came before us. She invites us to resist hopelessness and futurelessness. She invites us to be in attendance not only as a matter of here and now but as a matter of history and future. Crenshaw is asking us for attendance to past so that we work in the present for futures that are mindful of where we have been. Olga Idriss Davis described a near direct translation of *sankofa* in Houston's work saying that Houston was "reaching back and bringing forth a new wave of Black feminist scholars who have taken on her transformational and libratory spirit in their own scholarship" ("Giving").

***History from below.*** Rhetorical intersectionality practices what historian Lucien Febvre called "history from below" (Ruggiu 124). Ruggiu emphasized considering the narratives of people who have been marginalized, people left out of disciplinary canon, and people engaged in everyday ordinary activities contributing to history. Deborah Atwater's scholarship on intersectionality is focused on the areas of rhetoric and the history of rhetoric. She is committed to the uncovering and celebration of African American women whose places in the history of rhetoric and rhetoric of history have been compromised or diminished. Atwater embodies

intersectional scholarship with the principles of reclaiming historical space for them and *sankofa* or reaching back into their culturally grown philosophies to inform the current and future needs of women of color. Her attention to *sankofa* is found in reaching back to Afrocentric models of communication to define Black rhetoric: “a suitable model for Afrocentric communication theory would be the *Nhiwatiwa* Wheel of Involved Communication, for there is no source or audience everyone is involved in except the complementary relating of experiences unified by Nommo” (“Dilemma” 8).

Brenda Allen is committed to *sankofa* and history from below in the roots of feminism. She exhibits this in “Black Womanhood and Feminist Standpoints” when she goes back and gets the roots of feminist standpoint scholarship that contended a need to introduce the standpoints of women in evaluating knowledge and interrogating dominant claims of knowledge because so much of that had been built on the perspectives of men. She goes back and gets the history of feminist standpoint theory as socialist feminists’ seeking an extension of Marxist thought that expressed the need for the perspectives of the proletariat. Allen retrieves this and plants it firmly in the future of feminist standpoint theory as she articulates that feminist standpoint theory is enriched by intersectionality as it offers additional perspectives “due to the interlocking web of oppression that stems from belonging to two disenfranchised groups, women of color may enact the role of outsider or stranger differently from White women” (“Black Womanhood and Feminist Standpoints” 576).

Marsha Houston engages in *sankofa* and active preservation of history from below as she points out the presence of unique discourse in the face of “multiple jeopardy and multiple consciousness” having been found in the writings of African American women like Maria Stewart whose scholarship was present at the start of the American communication academic

tradition. She couches her study of everyday language in the memory of those traditions and history.

### Intersectionality: Historically Situated

In her works, Crenshaw explained and illustrated that intersectionality has three main manifestations: structural, political and representational. These manifestations were first described in two works Crenshaw published in 1989 and 1991. Crenshaw went on to produce and is still adding to, an expansive body of critical legal scholarship with intersectionality as its spine. References to her works in this project will include a large portion of them. Readers looking to gain a clear description of what Crenshaw meant by the term intersectionality should first read “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” published in 1989 and “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” published in 1991. These are the foundational texts of intersectionality definition in Crenshaw’s scholarship and they are where the three manifestations are defined. Each of these manifestations has oppressive outcomes and negative impacts on the lives of poor women of color. In this sense, intersectionality was coined as a term to describe injustice and oppression. Crenshaw’s coining of the term intersectionality is important to consider vis a vis coining as a metaphor more broadly. Coining is the process of taking of metal or a natural element and casting it, forming it, adding definition to it to give it a designation and character. We then create currency from the metal. We create something that communicates value and understanding (Gooch 202). This definition is especially important in the case of intersectionality as it can add to the conversation about Crenshaw’s role in the field. Intersectionality and scholarship on intersectional issues existed before Crenshaw introduced the term (Hill-Collins and Bilge 64) just

as the metal exists before the coin maker creates currency out of it. Her coining of the term intersectionality is critical because now we have a way to collectively identify intersectional experiences, name them and then have this name become a currency or a way of dealing with the transactions that occur and have to be exposed. These transactions, everyday experiences that become communicative actions (Berger and Burgoon, Miller, Roloff), build a body of cases, literature, and personal writings about what we as women of color and many of us poor women of color have experienced.

In her original articulation of intersectionality, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw defined it as an oppressive state in which various elements of one's identity as a poor woman of color converge to create unique forces of oppression. She explained that these forces take three main forms: structural, political and representational ("Mapping the Margins" 1243). The intersections have expanded, and oppression expresses itself on many fronts but the foundation of race and gender feeding into class, sexual identity, and others is something we should embrace, not erase. The historical perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how incredibly strong intersectionality can oppress but also how resilient it can make those in it. Situating the literature in history allows for a more nuanced and humanities enriched approach than creating data organization without characteristics. For example, the meaning of the term "color" has changed over time and over U.S. space. A view of that within historical context and with historical figures providing context is fruitful.

The physical and embodiment nature of that is important in terms of understanding where that leaves intersectionality today and one of communication scholarship's biggest concerns is that are careful not to rip away context. Crenshaw's work gives us a connecting ability to call historical context forward and put the historical embodiment notions in conversation with work

that is being done currently. In addition to capture and enslavement, women of color also literally bore the structure of enslavement and the generational chattel system (Gates). Many of them were women who were being raped and forced to bear children who would then become the property of someone else whether it was their own master who also may have happened to be the father of the children that were being born or someone to whom a master or mistress decided to sell a child. This practice often positioned women of color as the literal sites of the structure that held up the United States' original capital economy and, to this day, its social system. So, the ideas of race and class are built within the body of the African-American woman or, as these women may have been multi-ethnic, women of color (Jacobs).

### Structural Intersectionality

Intersectionality can be structural and manifest via systems that work to form a net of oppression. Structural intersectionality is described by Crenshaw as oppression that occurs when a person is discriminated against based on a structure that does not recognize layered identity. She explained "Women of color are differently situated in the economic, social, and political worlds. When reform efforts undertaken on behalf of women neglect this fact, women of color are less likely to have their needs met than women who are racially privileged" ("Mapping the Margins" 1250). The idea of structural intersectionality is addressed in the body of scholarship and activism called critical race theory (CRT). These works adjoin structural intersectionality to considerations of the rhetorical public sphere in communication scholarship.

David Gillborn's work "Intersectionality, Critical Race Theory, and the Primacy of Racism: Race, Class, Gender, and Disability in Education" serves as a locating piece to explicate the deep connections between structural intersectionality and CRT. The CRT volume *Words That Wound* is instrumental in developing notions of structural intersectionality in terms of

communication scholarship. In this collection, Charles R. Lawrence III asserted that *Brown v. Board* was a case about regulating racist speech. He noted that the key to this understanding of the case is that the practice of segregation, the practice the court held inherently unconstitutional, was speech. He explained that segregation was held unconstitutional mainly because of the message it conveyed and as such is one of few SCOTUS cases that regulate speech. He then addresses a critique leveled against his work: that his analysis mistakenly conflates speech and conduct. He responds to this critique by introducing social construct theory. Lawrence submits that in this case an analysis proposed by Kendall Thompson can be applied. If race is indeed a social construct, then it is a verb and we are “raced” (61). “Racing” is a constant action that is integral in speech and inseparable from the language that supports it. In this way, the CRT literature supports the highlighting of structural intersectionality in public spheres and transitions the discussion from structural intersectionality to the notion of the rhetorical public sphere. In seeking a constructive response to the structural oppression that emerges in communication, I celebrate reconstitution of Crenshaw’s intersectionality in communication scholarship and propose ways in which this reconstitution and reclamation can find new ground.

### Political Intersectionality

Political intersectionality is when specified identity agendas work to silence women of color to achieve voice that is uniform. Political intersectionality is the subjugation of narratives that tell stories of minority women because they do not fit a specific agenda. Crenshaw points to a person’s refusal to release information based on how it might affect specific political positions or agendas—sometimes causing Black women to be relegated to the shadows of an issue. For example, activists against domestic violence in the 1980s often did not want certain policing information released because they did not want domestic violence to be dismissed as a minority



problem. On the other hand, some anti-racism activists considered it progressive to suppress exposure of internal violence perpetrated by Black men on Black women based on the notion that we subvert Black liberation by doing this. Domestic violence was refocused and re-colored to highlight suburban White women's experiences. This pushed Black women to the margins and shifted the focus of research on domestic violence as if to say the suburban White women were the women who "matter":

Senator Boren and his colleagues no doubt believe that they have provided legislation and resources that will address the problems of all women victimized by domestic violence. Yet despite their universalizing rhetoric of "all" women, they were able to empathize with female victims of domestic violence only by looking past the plight of "other" women and by recognizing the familiar faces of their own ("Demarginalizing" 191).

### Representational Intersectionality

Representational intersectionality is the perpetuation of stereotypes in media and other public discourse that work in an oppressive manner. This third form of intersectionality marginalizes by stereotyping and over-representation of certain narratives in public communication about women of color and particularly poor women of color. A dialogic approach to communication ethics can offer an interrogative that truly seeks understanding rather than categorization. Dialogue can construct representational intersectionality that is no longer an array of faulty signifiers but is rather a rich and textured tapestry of conversations in which meaning is co-constructed. This connection between intersectionality and dialogic ethics is present in the work of Lester Olson as he remembers Audre Lorde within communication scholarship. The connection between intersectionality and dialogic ethics is also a key ingredient

in the work of Brenda Allen as she reclaims intersectionality in the space of diversity and inclusion.

Each of these scholars points to the necessity for interrogating communication scholarship for representational intersectionality and making room for the reconstruction of narrative space both in terms of the conducting of research itself being narrative in nature as well as room for additional research subject stories. Representational intersectionality can be a source of uplift when we celebrate and join the works of marginalized scholars to the dominant voices in the field and canonical literature. This celebration can also provide a relief view of details in research that might otherwise go unobserved. Representational intersectionality in communication scholarship does not have to be a force that disappears narratives but rather, treated with a holistic vision, it can be a force that enriches the field. The subsequent definitions of intersectionality have been open to interpretation. They include discussions beyond oppression and discussions beyond race, gender and class. The revolutionary and language-oriented claims of intersectionality are that constructed identity categories work in concert to reproduce oppressions but can also work to resist.

#### Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Root Scholarship

No doubt countless scholars and activists have worked on this issue over the course of U.S history. Intersectional constructs have existed throughout U.S. history. Enslavement had intersectional structures that specifically affected women of color in ways that were because they represented both classes. Enslavement is the foundation of the American class system. This system was used to establish the most enduring class structures in the society and much of the wealth derived from enslavement is still supporting the society while its degradation persists in communities of color. As such, intersectionality not only engages the idea of class but predates

and supports it. One could suggest that intersectionality was fundamentally conceived as being a nexus of race, gender, and class. One could also argue that intersectionality, as it was manifested in early American society, was a forerunner of class structure and along with race and gender constructs, served to produce class. Sojourner Truth and Lucy Parsons spoke of intersectional issues in the 19th century.

Ida B. Wells and W.E.B. DuBois spoke of them as they fought the intensity of budding Jim Crow era violence in the early 20th century. Audre Lorde and James Baldwin added nuances of sexuality and internal intersectional acceptance in the late 20th century. There is a long list of scholars and activists who recognized intersectionality and the reticulate production of oppression in the U.S. These scholars are honored in the work of Crenshaw and the work of activists pointing to intersectionality in the decades leading up to Crenshaw's seminal articles is heralded by Patricia Hill Collins and Selma Bilge in their text on Intersectionality. They caution against ignoring these forerunners: "Many contemporary scholars either ignore or remain unaware of this period, assuming that intersectionality did not exist prior to its naming in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Instead, they point to African-American legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's "coining" of the term as a foundational moment for intersectionality. Crenshaw's work is very important. Yet we take issue with this view that intersectionality began when it was named." (Hill Collins and Bilge 64)

This review of Crenshaw's work is not meant to take that stance. However, it is meant to honor Crenshaw's literature as foundational to intersectionality named as such and encourage celebration of her work. Many of those works are themselves celebrations of others. In her tribute to scholar Jim Jones, Crenshaw wrote: So, who is the "us" that stands to inherit the legacy of the race men and women like Jim Jones? I want to say we are those who know we have

benefitted from the efforts of Jim Jones and others who could have climbed the ladder to the ivory tower and pushed it away but did not” (“Keeping” 712). This tribute lights the way for understanding that Crenshaw’s foundation is held up by those who came before her and she understands the importance of their work. In this piece, she also resists a narrative of intersectionality that is exclusion-based and calls on the very democratic benefit Hill-Collins promotes years later, albeit not by the same name. Crenshaw understood the position of her term coining in the context of the family tree and encouraged scholars who came after her to do the same by both word and deed. She illustrates this in a commemorative piece on the CRT movement stating that “among the twenty-four participants who attended the first workshop, fully a third had been directly involved in the protracted and very public protest over race, curriculum, and faculty hiring at Harvard Law School six years earlier (“Critical Race Theory: A Commemoration” 5). Crenshaw also wrote essays in honor of scholars in her field like constitutional law giant Justice Brandeis and pedagogy expert Catharine MacKinnon whom she honored by challenging instructors to pull out those classroom closet skeletons and “interrogate and potentially disrupt these circuits of meaning, to reconnect links that have been broken, and to redirect critical scrutiny to the various tropes around which expressions of solidarity and rupture have been organized” (2). This is support for two of the aforementioned traits. Here she honors a trailblazer and confronts academia.

Crenshaw’s work bears the trait of *sankofa*. She considers a future that includes historical ground in her questions “So what is the trajectory that leads to the future that we say we want, one in which old patterns of racial exclusion? How do we not only reclaim yesterday’s future but make it even brighter?” (“Reclaiming Yesterday’s Future” 4). In this recognition of traits that resist the oppressive characteristics of structural, political and representational intersectionality,

Crenshaw invites us to recall the dreams and hopes communicated by those who came before us. She invites us to resist hopelessness and futurelessness. She invites us to be in attendance not only as a matter of here and now but as a matter of history and future. Crenshaw is asking us for attendance to past so that we work in the present for futures that are mindful of where we have been.

As a scholar in attendance myself, it was difficult to understand why others might wish to downplay the importance of her contributions by resisting an inclusion of her in the family of “foundational” literature. The question I could not escape was why would we want to make Crenshaw’s coining of the term take a back seat? The idea that intersectionality “begins” with Crenshaw is indeed flawed logic. Not only would it be in direct opposition to what caused Crenshaw to offer the term in the first place, but it would also significantly diminish understanding that how intersectionality works as oppression is rooted in historical choices and events. I have not found a place in communication scholarship seems to suggest that this is the case. However, I have found many communication studies that ignore Crenshaw’s contribution altogether. I suggest that the history on which Crenshaw’s work is built is important, yes. However, we can both acknowledge that and Crenshaw’s naming of the phenomenon. We can practice *sankofa*. Negritude existed before Césaire. Biopolitics existed before Foucault. We still honor and include them when we discuss the terms. This is not an issue. However, it would be an issue to attempt to diminish or question their roles in the histories of these terms.

#### Intersectionality. Because Buzz.

Democratization is fine but using intersectionality because it generates buzz presents some authenticity concerns. Remaining true to it is important. Doing this does not mean certain scholars have to leave the sphere at all. However, it does mean we cannot leave behind the

scholars who have made it so relatable. Our scholarship should not benefit from using the term intersectionality without interrogating why. There are overstated linkages between intersectionality and identity politics. Intersectionality can be about identity, but it can also be about limitations of identity and assumptions we risk when we begin to rank and order systems of identity. Finally, intersectionality should not imply static positioning. Intersections move and people in them move as well. While a lot of communication scholarship is aware of intersectionality and attentive to it, there is danger in this being done for form and fashion. Scholarship that engages the theory without connections to the foundation may be misleading. Some have called this phenomenon “splintersectionality” (Pierce). Hill Collins is calling for a democratization of intersectionality. She welcomes differing perspectives on what it means and how it manifests in the lived experience. People generally use intersectionality as an analytical tool to solve problems that they or others around them face (Hill Collins and Bilge 2). “Our goal in this book is to democratize the rich and growing literature of intersectionality - not to assume that only African-American students will be interested in Black history, or that LGBTQIA youth will be the only ones interested in queer studies, or that intersectionality is for any one segment of the population. Rather the task is to use intersectionality as an analytic tool to examine a range of topics” (Hill Collins and Bilge 30). Communication scholarship can highlight the reclamations that have occurred, demonstrate how they enhance praxis, and celebrate the inclusion of Crenshaw.

### Communication Scholarship on Intersectionality

Communication is an expansive interdisciplinary field of study. Intercultural, interpersonal, rhetoric, public relations, advertising and marketing, organizational, communication ethics, philosophy of communication, and communication analysis are all areas

where we find intersectional literature. Gender studies expert Ange Marie Hancock noted that “there is a great deal of slippage in the literature among the terms multiple identities, multiplicative identities, and intersectional identities. In earlier approaches categories are usually conceptualized as static and enduring - individuals are permanent members (67). She also noted that treating race and gender as parallel, often conflicting, phenomena creates some problems. Those problems include failure to produce coordination among marginalized groups and denial of groups who fall between the intersections. An intersectional approach would first claim that race is not the only category of difference at work in producing unequal outcomes among racial/ethnic groups.

There are so many topics and areas of interest in communication scholarship. Intersectionality is likely to be relevant in some way to most of them. In this project, I have selected areas most closely related to communication ethics and crisis in the public sphere. Even such a focus will demonstrate some overlap. For example, crisis in the public sphere may include cases specifically involving corporate business settings and call to mind a more marketplace sense of communication scholarship. There is no way to include all the scholars who have contributed to this body of work. We will look at a few who have worked alongside Crenshaw. Communication has emerged as a leader among fields acknowledging intersectionality study and engaging with its contours holistically.

Reconciliation and reclaiming agency are important. In this project, I will examine the work of Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston as scholars both embodying and theorizing an intersectionality that uplifts through open communication. I will describe and explain their roles in developing this framed research in communication. There are many others who have contributed as well. These scholars are featured in this study because they are

contemporaries of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, women of color, and have explicitly written about their own experiences in teaching, research and service providing a rich pool of resources from which to gather a well-rounded hermeneutic understanding of reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality and its characteristics. I will investigate how their approaches to intersectionality problems and embrace of the intersection helped to build a body of scholarship that articulates rhetorical intersectionality in praxis.

### Brenda Allen

Brenda J. Allen is the Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Colorado Denver and the Anschutz Medical Campus. Dr. Allen worked for years as a professor of communication conducting research on organizational communication and diversity. She described herself as “a Black, heterosexual, middle-aged woman scholar” (Allen, Orbe and Olivas 408). Brenda Allen states that she has always wanted to be a teacher and realizes that the aspiration likely came from an intersection where education was valued by Black family and community while sexism and gendered identity mapping often led women interested in careers to consider ones in nursing or teaching. She does not describe this as sexism. Those are my words. By sexism, I do not mean to imply that teaching and nursing are not both wonderful and empowering professions.

Allen grew up in Youngstown, Ohio. The mid-size rust belt city was segregated as many of the Ohio-PA border towns were during Allen’s upbringing. She described the racial make-up of her educational experiences and noted that she “attended a predominantly Black elementary school (with a majority of White teachers) after which I attended integrated schools where I often was the only Black female in my classes.” While Youngstown’s economy would have been robust during Allen’s upbringing, economic inequality was stark and became even more palpable



during the decline of the steel industry that coincided with her college years. She “earned a BA at a predominantly White university by winning a scholarship and working part-time.” For her graduate work, Brenda Allen attended the prestigious historically Black Howard University. Then, earning both an MA and a Ph.D. in communication. She discusses her path after graduate school in the context of both racial justice and feminist theoretical frameworks.

Allen’s work as an intersectional scholar is also evident in her piece, “Theorizing Race and Communication” where she explained that there are many theoretical possibilities for discussions on race within the field arguing that “Basically, it’s time to move beyond calls and critiques to action. To begin, we might refer to race-related theories or theoretical frameworks from other disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, ethnic studies, and legal studies. For instance, communication scholars Hasian and Delgado (1998) endorse critical race theory, an intellectual movement which contends that the legal system sustains White supremacy and social inequities through legal discourse. Within our discipline, we could consult Jackson’s cultural contracts theory (2002), McPhail’s (1997) complicity theory, and Orbe’s (1998) co-cultural theory, to name a few examples. We also could incorporate postcolonial approaches to theorizing race that “place performance of [racial] identity into a larger and socially/culturally contested frame” (“Cooks” 247). Allen further expresses that social construction is an area where she sees immense promise for engaging scholarship within communication that approaches race theoretically (261).

#### Deborah Atwater

Deborah F. Atwater served as the faculty ombudsperson and professor of Communication at The Pennsylvania State University. During her career at Penn State, she led a movement to provide support and mentoring for faculty of color and established a center to organize efforts.

Atwater participated in an episode of NPR's popular show StoryCorps in which she and her colleague and friend Cathy Lyons discussed the founding of the minority faculty mentoring program at Penn State in the late 1980s. They recognized that minority faculty would often feel isolated at the university in the sense that they may have been the only person of color in a department. Atwater and Lyons spoke of sometimes needing to speak a "different language" as they worked across disciplines to support people of color in departments ranging from psychology to agriculture.

Atwater's scholarship on intersectionality is focused on the areas of rhetoric and the history of rhetoric. She is committed to the uncovering and celebration of African American women whose places in the history of rhetoric and rhetoric of history have been compromised or diminished. Atwater embodies intersectional scholarship with the principles of reclaiming historical space for them and *sankofa* or reaching back into their culturally grown philosophies to inform the current and future needs of women of color.

Atwater is originally from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where she was raised by parents Tessie and Samuel Atwater alongside her three brothers. She arrived in Centre County, Pennsylvania to attend Penn State for college in 1967. Atwater reported that "her assigned roommate, who was White, burst into tears upon seeing her for the first time. Fortunately, 10 other girls on her floor offered to room with her, and the resident assistant was able to soothe ruffled feelings" ("Voices" i). She became a member of the Delta Sigma Theta Black sorority and "earned high grades in her courses, overcoming the patronizing attitude of a few White instructors." Her intersectionality work includes a book dedicated to the study of African-American women's rhetorical theory and practice; a remembrance piece on the rhetoric of Septima Clark; and an exploration of the rhetorical history of Black mayors in the United States.

In 2007, she published a ground-breaking article about the rhetoric of (then Senator) Barack Obama and the feasibility of a presidential election bid noting intersectionality as a key feature of potential success. History proved Atwater correct and she proves the importance of rhetorical history in intersectionality study.

### Marsha Houston

Marsha L. Houston, Ph.D., formerly Marsha Houston Stanback, began her career in the field of Communication during the early 1980s. She is a contemporary of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw who brought intersectionality to the field just as Crenshaw did to Law and Legal Studies. Over her career which is now approaching four decades, she has served in faculty and administrative roles at several universities over the years including the University of Alabama, Tulane University, Georgia State University Spelman College, and the University of Southern Mississippi.

Houston has made a wealth of contributions to the scholarship of communication including articles in such premier journals as the Quarterly Journal of Speech, Discourse and Society and Women and Language. Houston has served as an editor and co-written some of the discipline's first and foremost books dedicated to the exploration of language theory that centers women of various backgrounds. These include *Our Voices: Essays in Culture, Ethnicity, and Communication* and *Centering Ourselves: African American Feminist and Womanist Studies of Discourse*. Both of these texts were honored with National Communication Association book awards and are credited with opening doors for additional works that gave rise to the scholarship of intersectionality in the field of communication. In 1994 Marsha Houston was awarded Francine Merritt Award for outstanding contributions to women in the NCA and the communication discipline ("Giving", Jackson).

Marsha Houston was born on November 29, 1945, in Greensboro, North Carolina. 1945 saw the beginning of the United States' baby boom after the end of World War II and Germany's surrender. 1945 was also the year that began the nuclear war era with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor. In the American South, Jim Crow was deeply entrenched, and the existence of Black people was under constant threat. Many families or individuals decided to move to the northern and western cities of the United States where they hoped their economic and social conditions might be less dangerous (Wilkerson 9).

This was no different for the residents of Greensboro, North Carolina. Many folks left and moved north to places like New York, Philadelphia, and Detroit seeking better prospects. Those who stayed behind did not quietly accept their conditions. Greensboro is home to North Carolina A&T and Bennett Colleges, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) founded to offer economic opportunity via education of African-American students who generally would not have been admitted to most other schools. The state is also home to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Each of these schools experienced growth during the 1940s and 1950s (Jackson). Marsha Houston grew up in a place where education was a cultural good and scholars of color were an integral part of the community. Greensboro North Carolina was also a critical site of the modern Civil Rights movement. In 1960, when Marsha Houston was 15 years old, a group of Black college students in Greensboro began sitting at lunch counters in the local Woolworth's Five and Dime store in protest of the segregation policies in place there. Houston was growing up in a place where not only was the Black cultural commitment to higher education strong but those involved in that commitment were also mobilized for justice and equality. Her family and community had a profound influence on her interest in education. No doubt, this strong influence was with her when she joined six other young Black women as the

first to enter Emory University, then Emory College, several miles to the south in a suburb of Atlanta, Georgia (Jackson and Givens 173). Here is where her life as a scholar took shape. Houston began her undergraduate study in 1964 at the nexus of the modern Civil Rights, Anti-war and Women's Liberation movements. In this year Fannie Lou Hamer made her historical appearance at the Democratic National Convention to expose the state-sponsored violence and poverty she witnessed in Mississippi. Houston went on to earn a Ph.D. in interpersonal communication and rhetoric from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1983 where W. Barnett Pearce was her professor and would go on to become a co-author. Her dissertation advisor, Fern Johnson, described a pivotal encounter in a graduate seminar during the fall semester of 1979 where the members of the course read Robin Lakoff's 1975 book *Language and Woman's Place*. During the discussion about the text, Houston noted that the markers of women's discourse described by Lakoff are considerably foreign to the experiences she herself has had with Black women she knew. Her advisor recalls that "Marsha did a project for the course that eventually led to a dissertation proposal that led to a dissertation that led to a very important publication. The dissertation, completed in 1983, was titled "Code-Switching in Black Women's Speech" ("Giving"). Like the other women represented in this study, Houston's dissertation is a clear signal of her dedication, research plan, and life.

Writing about Black women was and still is an act of courageous speech, especially for Black women. We are faced with warnings that choosing a narrow and boxing topic may be detrimental to our career prospects – "branding" us as scholars with an "agenda". Indeed, I have heard these words, contemplated them and had my own fights with them. To branding, I say no more. I come from a long line of people who endured branding in its originating form like farm

animals and wore the brand only to push forward the promise of a day when their children would not have to do the same.

Houston was one of the first communication scholars to engage in intersectional futurism in which she imagines a future where margins are constantly challenged, and structures can be dismantled and unformed rather than reformed. Houston proposes including multiple narratives that defy the assumed laws of identity physics which do not account for several opinions, ideas or stances to occupy the same place at the same time. Houston has several mixed-methods research pieces in her literature but never fails to privilege and investigate lived experience. Her recognition of this led to a lifetime of scholar-activism honored by colleagues in the field. In 2005, several of these colleagues put together a surprise honoring of Houston at the National Communication Association convention just before she celebrated her 60th birthday. And, in 2006, Ronald Jackson II and Sonja Brown Givens profiled her in their book *Black Pioneers in Communication Research*. Her colleague and co-author, Olga Idriss Davis, states that Houston “has problematized the intersectionality of race, class, gender not as simple, disparate variables, but as interactive and ideological—placing a unique angle of vision on the study of the lived experience of Black women” (“Giving”).

### In Search of Rhetorical Intersectionality

Patricia Hill Collins and Selma Bilge issued an important call for intersectionality research to be examined as both critical inquiry and praxis going forward: “In order to remain a vibrant, growing endeavor, intersectionality must cast a self-reflexive eye on its own truth and practices. The creative tension joining these two dimensions constitute a self-reflexive space to understand intersectionality writ large” (191). The goal of this work is to answer their call by including threads that examine intersectionality theory as praxis and vice versa. This project also

incorporates the self-reflection of the author as an intersectionality feature. The theoretical, praxis and reflective aspects are woven together to depict a portrait of intersectionality that is particularly rhetorical in nature. This rhetorical nature is characterized by notions of silence, *parrhesia*, and listening. In the following three chapters, I will explore these metaphors in theory. I will look at how Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston add intersectional depth to the theoretical literature, and I will examine how they are reflected in praxis. Then, in the final chapter, I will review how these connections have developed a theory of rhetorical intersectionality and offer an autoethnographic account of rhetorical intersectionality and civic engagement.

## CHAPTER TWO: SILENCE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Oftentimes published research on gender and communication is characterized by the omission, erasure, or distortion of the experiences of women of color (Houston and Kramarae). This is a silence in the research that exacerbates a long history of silence in other arenas. In this chapter, I will first define key terms and look at some theories of silence. These include theories of silence as a language in situations of bondage, silence and its relationship to protection, and silence and its relationship to power. Next, I will examine links between silence and intersectionality with the scholarship of Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston as a guide. I will then transition from that guide to some applications and artifacts that further reveal and explicate the linkages between silence and intersectionality. Finally, I will end the chapter with autoethnographic notes and an exploration of how this discourse contributes to rhetorical intersectionality.

### Key Terms and Scholars

***Abolition.*** Abolition refers to the movement to abolish systems in which people are captured, or trafficked, or forced to work without agreed upon compensation. The abolition of the Atlantic slave trade and enslavement in the Americas is the main heuristic through which people examine the idea. Key scholars include Frederick Douglass, the Grimke sisters, John Brown and Sojourner Truth who all wrote of the moral deficits and human rights violations of trading humans and enslavement in the 19th century. Abolitionism was and still is a multicultural, multigenerational intersectional movement. Beyond being just anti-slavery, abolitionists espoused the belief that slavery should not exist for any reasons, but they were



particularly disgusted by the practice that existed in the Americas during the 18th and 19th centuries. This movement played out in English courts, on Portuguese boats, and in the American presidency. While the American Civil War was not fought wholly for this cause, it certainly played an important role. The movement was one built on communication both in public and private spaces. The private sphere is where the Underground Railroad thrived, and interpersonal relationships sought to protect and promote the good of human freedom. With their relationships, abolitionists both affirmed and embodied the good of persons we see become a central component of the dialogic experience. Many of their letters to one another were preserved in family archives or publicized as part of national history and identity thus removing the exclusion of others and allowing for an inclusive public view of their thoughts. Abolitionism continues in contemporary times as the enslavement still occurs all around the world including in the United States (Bales). In addition to illegal enslavement and trafficking of people, the legal United States prison system is proposed by many scholars as an extension of the system of slavery sanctioned by the 13th amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Alexander, Blackmon, Davis). Angela Davis emerges as a key scholar in this arena proposing intersectionality as a key area of investigation in abolition. I refer to as “rhetorical” intersectionality while all the other forms of intersectionality employ rhetoric the idea of reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality speaks to are inclusion, survival, thriving, human flourishing. “Rhetorical” intersectionality means that communicators are attentive to structural, political, representational intersectionality as they are presented rhetorically and opens meaning so that we interpret discourse differently. Gerard Hauser proposes that public spheres are not formed after or before discourse but rather by the discourse itself. He outlines a rhetorical framework of public spheres that can offer deeper insight into the prison abolition movement by acknowledging its created spheres are formed in

its discourse. He also notes the important role of historicity in the narratives from which discourses and dialogues emerge. In this sense, it is important to look at trends that may exist both in the public spheres formed by prison abolition discourse and those formed in slavery abolition discourse as we can establish strong links in the American perpetuation of human trafficking with that of imprisonment. Hauser's model of networked spheres may also offer revelations as to how prison abolition can engage its many intertwined ethics threads and promote a more unified social movement atmosphere in which to work. This is particularly exigent as we recognize that the prison abolition movement exists for the most part in the domain of rhetoric. That is, much of the work different factions of the movement can agree needs to be done is on language, meaning, and development of new dialogical paradigms. Communication that works in the movement's multi-sphere setting then becomes critically important if the spheres on which it depends for advancement are to continue to emerge. Using Hauser's theories of discourse constituted publics and moral vernaculars, we can recognize the power that everyday interactions have to enact change and widespread social movement. Prison abolition discourse isn't appealing to public spheres but rather creating them as it develops.

Hauser argues for the public sphere as a nested domain of particularized arenas or multiple spheres populated by participants who, by adherence to standards of reasonableness reflected in the vernacular language of conversational communication, discover their interests, where they converge or differ, and how their differences might be accommodated. We can establish this for prison abolition by identifying how it fits Hauser's theory of a rhetorical model of the public sphere. Those spheres are severely impacted by intercultural dialogue needs from the racial justice issues to the concerns of LGBTQIA communities, immigrant communities, and feminist activists. The rhetoric of prison abolition is a multidimensional one that creates many

spheres. Perhaps a way to network these spheres is to distinguish the vernacular. This is what Hauser says allows us to find the virtues of the larger "human rights" movement. Distinguishing the vernacular and building a vocabulary is also how we find the characteristics and virtues of rhetorical intersectionality.

**Acknowledgment.** Michael Hyde explains acknowledgment as an ontological element. The ability to be recognized as a fellow human is, for Hyde, a critical component of what it actually means to be human. In this work, acknowledgment refers to the willingness to point to lived experiences and affirm that they have influenced the lives of our fellow humans. An unwillingness to acknowledge one another is rhetorically exclusionary. Lack of acknowledgment leads to marginalization. In intersectionality, this lack of acknowledgment occurs in multiple ways that push certain members into even tighter spaces of interlocking oppression.

**Bondage.** As referenced above, bondage is any system in which a person is captured, held against his or her will, or forced to work without agreed upon pay. While bondage is typified by the system of slavery in the American south, it is important to note that enslavement can be identified in many societies (including the pre-emancipation American north) and is still practiced in contemporary times despite a general acceptance that owning other human beings is a violation of human rights.

**Power.** Power is the ability to exert control over the available choices of other people. Power can be characterized as being legitimate (i.e. elected officials) or unjust (i.e. dictatorships). In some instances, power is challenged because its legitimacy is challenged. Power is often discussed in relationship to other ideas including control of resources (economic power), control of knowledge (information power) and control of networks (media power). The lines among these things and how they overlap with notions of politics are plentiful and difficult

to trace. In this project, power refers specifically to the ability to affect change (positive or negative). Each of the featured scholars in this study (Allen, Atwater, Crenshaw and Houston) discuss power at this level and contribute ideas to its nature.

***Protection.*** The ability to avoid a harmful outcome is the nature of protection. The term refers to any means by which a person may seek to preserve his or her life and/or avoid an outcome of pain and suffering. Audre Lorde offers in-depth insights on the nature of protection as a motivator for silence. The theory that humans employ tools motivated by protection is articulated by Richard Lazarus in psychology literature. For the purposes of this project, Lorde's work will be the basis for examining protection and the structural intersectionality that produces fear of lack of protection.

***Sexual Harassment.*** This work adheres to a definition of sexual harassment outlined in the United States' Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) code as "unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature." The EEOC also states that "both victim and the harasser can be either a woman or a man, and the victim and harasser can be the same sex."

***Silence.*** Silence is the inability to express one's full experiences either by choice as a way of maintaining power or protecting a person from negative outcomes, or by force in positions of power or coercion. Silence is the central metaphor of this chapter. In addition to Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston, there are some key scholars who inform the issues and ideas of silence. Robin Patric Clair, Tillie Olsen and Cheryl Glenn join the others to enrich understandings of silence as a communication metaphor and its relationship to intersectionality. In the next section, their theories will be explored to further express meanings of silence.

*Self-care.* Rhetorical intersectionality maintains the need for self-care of all parties involved and for that care to be a collective effort (Patel). Building on the ideas of *ubuntu*, we see that the researcher and the environment in which she operates must be one conducive to survival. To that end, rhetorical intersectionality allows for the author's voice and relating of personal experience. Issues are exposed. Business is in the street. Dirty laundry is aired. Skeletons are pulled from closets whether they be personal, departmental or societal. Communicative engagement via exposure is perhaps the most fragile and tenuous of these features. Brenda Allen described experiencing this when one of her former students, an African American male, was accused of rape. "Some members of the Black community wanted me to support the student when he was barred from campus prior to his trial, and women's groups wanted me to support their position that the student should not be allowed on campus." Her position and a need to shine light on it has often been discouraged both in our roles on campuses and our roles in research. Rhetorical intersectionality allows us to lay this burden down. The long tradition of avoiding placing the researcher in the discourse or even avoiding discussion of the discourse creation itself within scholarship is broken in rhetorical intersectionality scholarship.

### Some Theories of Silence

#### Silence in Bondage

The relationship between silence as a language spoken in bondage is one of structural intersectionality. Silencing has served and continues to serve as a reinforcement for systems of holding people in margins and spaces of oppression (Glenn). Silencing has also been used to isolate and separate people from one another keeping them in communicative bondage. This is well documented in the remembrances of formerly enslaved people who participated in the

interviews and photography of the Federal Writers Project of 1936. The project produced a body of first-hand accounts entitled *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*. The experiences of women are included in the narratives and documentation of the abuse they endured based on sex is clear. These were experiences that, like bondage itself, did not end with emancipation and while some stories were told, many were not. This allowed the experiences to carry additional weight in the perpetuation of silence that continued bondage literally binding history. In the realm of rhetoric, history is a critical member of the bodies of work we examine. Breaking silences is itself a fixture of the history of rhetoric in the intersection as it can be pronounced in a United States cultural context. An examination of silence and bondage from the layered identity perspective of intersectionality presented African-American women with opportunities to break silence in ways that also broke bondage. Harriet Jacobs, a woman who escaped slavery in North Carolina and hid in an attic crawl space for over a decade to avoid recapture, published one of the first narratives detailing life in American slavery. She honed her skill at reading and writing expressly for the purpose of documenting her own story and breaking silence and moving into a free future. (Jacobs 303) The impact of this bondage was not one felt solely by women over the course of the African-American quest for civil rights but by others as well. The relationship between silence and bondage is one with deep roots and this history is an important component of understanding communication intersectionality theories. Audre Lorde's work offers extensive attention to this and proposes voice over silence:

And where the words of women are crying to be heard, we must each of us recognize our responsibility to seek those words out, to read them and share them and examine them in their pertinence to our lives. That we not hide behind the mockeries of separations that have been imposed upon us and which so often we accept as our own" (Lorde 43).

Women in the intersection, whether African-American or hailing from other marginalized backgrounds, understood the relationship between silence and bondage. They have left historical records for us to use in the quest for social justice. They also understood communication as important ground for this work. They intentionally broke silences, widened the margins and pushed into the mainstream their own senses of communicative engagement and meaning-making. Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston each address silence both in the context of their own areas of study and in the broader contexts of the discipline and its academic position.

Silence is an important component of communication study. In some experiences, silence is not only the absence of speech but also the absence of acknowledgment of lived experiences. Silence as a refusal of acknowledgment takes on more than the elements of communication that are mechanical and transactional. In this sense, silence takes on deep rhetorical and ethical implications by threatening the acknowledgment of the existence of experiences and therefore history. This kind of silence is a harbinger of genocide (Schrag).

Reversing the oppressive nature of structural, political and representational intersectionality includes recognizing and breaking the long silences that have reinforced bondage. Communication scholars must study and acknowledge this in order to embody the principles of complete scholarship and analysis. These explorations are important for communication scholarship on many levels. Many researchers agree that the study of marginal or vernacular discourses provides for a more complete study of topics in the field as a whole. The inclusion of marginal voices is both ethically and academically necessary. Without it, we do not have sound academic work and we ignore the ethical call to which we are bound thus invalidating our scholarship and our philosophical claims. As Pat Gehrke wrote in *The Ethics*

and Politics of Speech “These calls to study everyday, private, and vernacular discourses were claims not only that a proper examination of communication requires broader perspective, but also that the political and ethical obligations of academics established what Ono and Sloop called a ‘specific need, given historical power relations, to study communities that have been systematically ignored” (114).

### Silence, Power, and Protection

Cheryl Glenn’s *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* posits a theory of silence as rhetoric that lays claim to power by becoming speech itself and carrying meaning. Glenn looks at theories of silence over time including Max Picard’s work on silence as a rhetorical virtue and a religious principle. For instance, oaths and vows of silence have been part of religious devotional action. Glenn also highlights the work of Bernard Dauenhauer on silence and phenomenology in which he examines different types of silence as intervening, fore-and-after, and deep silence. The first of these are depicted as normal silences in speech. One that is an opportunity for expression and one that draws the lines in conversations. Both of those silences assume equality of the communicators but when they are deployed in contexts where there is inequality, they can take on the same oppressive characteristics as the forbidding of speech. Deep silence exists in and for states of freedom. Deep silence is different from silence that imposes because it reclaims agency and introspection. Deep silence connects to freedom by connecting to the ability that Merleau-Ponty described for a person to recapture and reimagine the meaning of her body in the time and space it occupies (Glenn 18). This is covered extensively by scholars in the new edited volume *Silence, Feminism, Power: Reflections at the Edges of Sound*.

Cheryl Glenn also explored silences in the history of rhetoric in *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity to Through the Renaissance* in which she described



her project as negotiating and listening to “both imposed and tactical silences” it sparked the research Cheryl Glenn conducted. “It is ironic that women have not been named as contributors to the creation and development of language. They are virtually invisible in the past and current hypotheses of language origin. Their lives are silenced as if they did not and do not exist. It is time to ask the question that Spender (1980) claims has not yet been asked: What role did women play in the production and development of language?” (Clair 10). In terms of silence and power, there is a spectrum of theoretical viewpoints that are necessary to highlight here. Silence can reinforce power, but it can also be used to thwart it. Some theorists have examined how marginalized people have reclaimed power through silence creating a counter-narrative and rhetoric of their own that speaks via silence. “Lydia’s decision to maintain a public silence about the rape— not “to deal” with her anger as Silas demands (and desires)—constitutes a subtle form of rebellion against being told what, why, when, and how much to feel. For so often when “women’s issues” are taken up, as in the TRC’s women’s hearings, the attention given to them serves a broader agenda, such as nation-building, in which such issues have been deemed topical or convenient.”

While the commission’s logic implies that to be silenced or voiceless entails a lack of agency, Lydia’s evolution over the course of the novel suggests otherwise. Within the “zone of silence,” one imposed initially by Silas but then maintained by her own choice, she grows. This “zone of silence” creates a safe space for her (208). The relationship between silence and protection for women of color is one of political intersectionality. Audre Lorde’s work provides a body of maxims on silence. These maxims are frequently revisited by scholars of intersectionality. Her maxim of realizing that her silences had not protected her and declaration that “your silence will not protect you” prompt an investigation that is attentive to history.

Silence has not always been anti-protective. In fact, it had at some points been a necessary component of the path to freedom. This is true of the Tubman underground railroad trips and Jacobs' thirteen years hiding. But it is also true of later years in the U.S. This is described by journalist Michelle Norris in her family memoir *The Grace of Silence*. Norris discusses her family's history of enduring discrimination in silence and keeping that silence to protect their children from being negatively affected by the persistence of oppression and instead sought to empower them with narratives of hope.

Robin Patric Clair states "The silences around the words are as powerful and as numerous in meaning and valence as the words themselves." She also wrote that silence is a varying operator that can exist in spaces that are poetic or political with different forms such as failure to respond to questions or acknowledge presence; different uses such as creating distance or solidarity; and different results such as being held in contempt of court or being left out of a discussion. Clair wrote "the words we speak, the actions we employ, express a rich and complex world beyond the surface reflection that we generally take for granted" (23). The relationship between silence and power is theoretically rich; with representational intersectionality at its core. As we discussed in the section on silence and bondage, silencing people is a way to maintain power and hierarchical structures. "African American feminists challenge the White middle-class values of the often well-educated, White feminists (hooks, 1984). Audre Lorde (1984) challenges not only the White middle-class value system of some feminists, but also the heterosexuality encouraged by certain representations of womanhood, of racial identity, and of sexual orientation as a heterosexual given. Clair explains that various forms of silence breaking have provided challenges to one another. Ecofeminists challenge both African American and White feminists for the failure to recognize the plight of the Native American people and the

land that they hold dear (Gaard). Third World women challenge those who have assisted the colonizers...Other challengers add their voices and concerns to the litany of problems that have plagued marginalized and silenced members of society (Clair 190). These challenges are invitational and persuasive. They also recreate the space in language and point to the phenomenological rhythms of rhetoric thereby opening public space and establishing discourse. Clair situates this as a term of post-modernity and explains that this is the creation of reality. Clair states that aesthetic theory suggests that discourses are creative experiences. She recognizes that aesthetics can take many expressive forms including the written or spoken word. She supports the earlier notion that silence can be expression unto itself and forms an utterance that contributes to discourse. This aesthetic framing is an approach to rhetoric that considers most artifacts and experiences of the lived world as rhetorical contributions in that we assign meaning to them all or in the lack of meaning, objects, phrases, poems, music and a host of other fixtures of our worlds, express something. If everything is rhetoric and rhetoric is constantly solidifying our experiences of the world, an interrogation of this is profoundly difficult. This can lead to a sense of futility and abandonment that return us to a silence that is bondage. Clair does not suggest that a cyclical nature of rhetoric and lived experience creating discourse should mean a lack of action. Instead, she points to the overlapping points in our experiences as a way forward. She writes that this framing works with, not against the pins of post-modernity where it becomes a perspective along with “the feminist perspective, the critical perspective, the interpretive perspective, and the shared and overlapping combinations of these perspectives in order to provide us with a rhetoric of untold, unheard, unseen, and heretofore unimagined possibilities” (Clair 186). These unimagined possibilities are uncovered from within the intersection. The

power of Clair's statement is in realizing that without heading to the marginalized perspective to gather the rest, we can't possibly look for the overlaps.

Tillie Olsen's *Silences* confronts this issue in literature with several important observations and bold assertions. First, she examines the nature of silence in the production of work as it is related to a need for inspiration and rest. She distinguishes this "natural" silence from "unnatural" ones and states that the unnatural ones are sufferings under systems where oppression precludes the needs of creativity. While many writers find themselves able to overcome this unnatural silence, many do not. The second type of silence she observes in American literature is censorship. Olsen evaluates the state of the American literary world over the century before her in several facets. She considers gender, race, and class the main components of foundational intersectionality research. Olsen noted that not only are people censored but ideas as well "These pressures toward censorship, self-censorship; toward accepting, abiding by entrenched attitudes, thus falsifying one's own reality, range, vision, truth, voice, are extreme for women writers (indeed have much to do with the fear, the sense of powerlessness that pervades certain of our books, the "above all, amuse" tone of others). Not to be able to come to one's truth or not to use it in one's writing, even in telling the truth having to "tell it slant," robs one of drive, of conviction; limits potential stature; results in loss to literature and the comprehensions we seek in it."

#### Examining Silence and Intersectionality

In her 1991 speech "Race, Gender and Sexual Harassment" at The Forum for Women State Legislators Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw offered gratitude to Anita Hill for her willingness to "shatter the silence on sexual harassment" (1467). She then pointed out the dilemma of Hill's fortitude as she balanced a choice between silence and shattering that puts women between a

rock and a hard place of enduring the trauma that came with repressing physical abuse privately or enduring public psychological abuse. Crenshaw also highlighted Hill's other rock and a hard place of race and gender. She recognizes the hypersexualized stereotypes and discrediting of Black women and men steeped in history noting a study of rape jury trials where Black women were victims in which a juror participant stated: "you can't believe everything they say; they're known to exaggerate the truth" (1470). Crenshaw's point is that race and class compound the experience of gendered silence and other aspects of marginalization further complicate this compounding. She stated that her approach "is an attempt to illustrate the many nuances that a gender-only framework misses and to suggest that it is through addressing precisely these silences that we can open the door to a vibrant and powerful women's agenda" (1469).

Crenshaw described poor women of color maintaining silences about relationship violence because of the fear that breaking that silence will result in a reinforcing system of problems. For example, if a woman is poor, reporting an assault at the hands of an intimate partner could mean a crucial loss of income. Being non-White brings its own set of complexities including the danger that police may respond by murdering the assailant rather than going through the proper protocol and delivery of due process. Additionally, if a woman is in a non-heterosexual relationship, she may be reluctant to report violence because of fear of being "outed" or being treated as though the relationship is abnormal rather than the behavior in the relationship. This is an abnormality that is in turn made more prominent by racism. Transgender women of color are five times more likely to be killed than their White counterparts.

Brenda Allen researches the relationship between silence, protection, and the intersection in organizational communication. She found that there were profound silences in the research that served to protect certain narratives while suppressing others. Her research exposed the

problems of representational and political intersectionality in scholarship on women in the workforce noting that “Discussions about women and the workforce generally overlook or omit the fact that women of color and other working-class females have been part of the workforce since the early 1900s (Ammott and Matthaie 1991). It was only when middle-classed women were forced to work because of economic reasons in the period beginning in the mid-70s that the topic came to the forefront” (“Feminist” 260). The centering of the discourse in gender organizational communication research around issues facing middle-class women threatened to marginalize the experiences of poor women who had been dealing with workplace issues and engaged in labor justice movements for decades. Allen’s commitment to their stories reverses the flow of silencing and political intersectionality. In addition to ignoring the presence of lower-class women and women of color in the workforce, Allen found that research was focused on certain kinds of positions that women in the intersection were less likely to have held. She noted “rarely have researchers looked at traditional female work or those jobs which persons of color tend to occupy (e.g. secretaries, maids, waiters/waitresses, factory workers, etc.) Even among the limited number of studies about Black professionals, the experiences of Black women receive fleeting references” (“Twice Blessed, Doubly Oppressed” 4). Here she finds a distinct intersectional problem arising in that studies labeled as research on “people of color typically focuses only on Blacks, thereby overlooking members of other ethnic plurality groups.” (“Twice Blessed, Doubly Oppressed” 4) Allen proposes “redress” which would serve to fill the large void of attention offered to people in the intersections and marginalized by way of multiple identity markers.

Allen demonstrates possibilities for this redress in many of her works. For example, she examined, with Karen Ashcraft, pedagogical texts used in organizational communication

courses. In this study of the texts used in the field, Allen and Ashcraft found race and ethnicity essentialism prevented the necessary intersectional work of complicating identity and exploring intersectionality. They suggest selecting course texts and developing course texts that seek to “Problematize the persistence of essential conceptions of race and develop alternatives to them.” (Ashcraft and Allen 31). They outline a series of additional steps toward realizing this goal that include explicit discussions of racial categorizations and the impossibility of delineating them without mixtures and collective difference. Ashcraft and Allen urge organizational communication scholars to “avoid the tendency toward racial dualism or bifurcating race as a Black-White issue” (31). This is a confirmation of a commitment to inclusion and rejection of polarization that reverses multiplied oppression in the intersection. Poles serve to reinforce margins. “I look forward to being more forthcoming about my concerns and my ideas for how my department can seriously address diversity issues. I can no longer stand the silence” (“Complexity” 412).

Atwater also addressed the realizations that the protections provided by silence had expiration dates through her research on the rhetorical history of African-American women and paying attention to the revolutionary silence breaking work of abolitionism. She explores the lives of women for whom keeping silence may have meant keeping a much-needed job or keeping ties with family who were also much needed. In some instances, silence was a protection of knowledge and a function of handing reins over to a quiet resistance or underground railroad of activities being organized to support freedom. Those silences could be long and painful. The price of them was often sanity. The recognition of *kairos*; moments where it was the right time to break those long silences and the power of breaking them from the intersection is a feature of intersectionality’s ability to push against oppression and instead uplift people. Atwater explained

that this breaking of silences is theorized and practiced by women of color early on in the United States. Phillis Wheatley broke the silence of communication as she became the first African woman in the Americas to publish a book. Breaking the silence and silencing that was perpetrated on enslaved Africans by preventing them from learning to read and write. As enslavement became more entrenched in the U.S., the movement to abolish it became more of a network and much of that network depended on the intersections of race class and gender as performed through rhetoric.

So, in addition to Atwater's study of rhetorical history, attention to the interpersonal realm has also advanced intersectional scholarship on silence and protection. Marsha Houston has contributed significantly to the research on silence, protection and intersectionality in the interpersonal communication arena. In an article on this silencing Houston and Cheris Kramarae identify several dynamics that stop women from communication. They acknowledge that these dynamics can work in forces of oppressive intersectionality as they confront issues that affect women in different positions or from different cultural backgrounds. For instance, they point to homophobia as a silencer. This is a silence detailed extensively by Audre Lorde in her work that is atypically honest about academic life as a queer woman of color. They also talk about the politicization of women's bodies as scientific ground. The opening of the article described a situation encountered in teaching a course. This reveals another component of reversing oppressive forces of intersectionality as it addresses the position of the Black academic woman without the common bracketing of one's own experiences. They then go on to illustrate ways in which speech can occur and silence can be broken. One of them is coining terms or having courage to recognize issues where there is no language to describe it or identify it. This is an important connection to the meaning of Crenshaw. As we have discussed before, it is true that



women were writing about the interlocking oppression forces experienced by women of color before Crenshaw. But it is also true that her coining of the term intersectionality is an important moment and claiming of space. The willingness of other scholars to embrace and expand the term while honoring her contribution is space claiming and reclaiming. This willingness is also part of another contour that defines the breaking of silence, remembering, and honoring.

“Even in Daniels et al.’s (1997) chapter on diversity, the notion of “cultural control” is couched in management/employee terms, safely bracketed from the discussion of race that follows.

Similar silences echo in comparable sections of Jablin and Putnam (2000) and Miller (1999). It is worth noting that these silences and separations are not limited to discussions of race; for example, similar rhetorical features often typify discussions of ethics or class (Cheney, 2000).

(Ashcraft and Allen 12) In this article they also affirm their stance in intersectionality as directly connected to Crenshaw with a nod to her research by ending the piece with this paragraph:

Crenshaw (1997) argues that “the ideology of White privilege maintains its invisibility through rhetorical silence” (p. 268). This article has endeavored to articulate and dismantle subtle, disciplined tactics that disguise our participation in preserving the normative power of organized Whiteness. By no means are we committed to the precision or finality of our analysis. Our current ambition is to spark overdue dialogue about troubling, taboo questions. Our grander hope is to unearth and rebuild the racial foundation of organizational communication. (33)

In this passage, Allen and Ashcraft seek to move discussion from the breaking of long silences to focus on participatory dialogue. This is a move that transforms intersectionality into a phenomenon of uplift to a next iteration of rhetorical intersectionality wherein bold and honest speech can exist and roots of current dynamics can be exposed.

Deborah Atwater’s work stresses a remembering and honoring of other women of the intersection to uplift not only those who find ourselves here now but also those who work so tirelessly to help us. Her scholarship is explicitly aware of women who have written about and

experienced the intersection before. This remembering and honoring recognizes a starting point that is not above on the lofty pedestals where we tend to place our heroines but rather below in the roots and soil where the ability to raise our voices was sewn with literal blood, sweat and tears. In Atwater's work, *African-American Women's Rhetoric*, she carefully remembers and recognizes intersectional paragons like Sojourner Truth who's "Ain't I A Woman" speech is intersectional canon. Atwater also recognizes and remembers the legions of unnamed women surviving in the intersection with courageous living of everyday acts. This necessarily includes the silence breaking that ensured survival of the institutions of enslavement and subjugation in the origins of the United States.

Atwater's work attends to meaning and symbols in colonial contexts that were often made in hate and fear. She recognizes the design to perpetuate a rationale for the existence of the race-based institution of slavery. Slave women were given the attributes of animals. Oftentimes being called by monikers associated with animals such as gal, heifer, sow, etc. Women's relationships with their children were also seen as animalistic being void of pathos and complexity. This extended to intellectual issues as well. Enslaved people were often forbidden from learning to read or write. However, as Atwater illustrated throughout her work, we have many women who refused to submit to this silencing. Sometimes the price of breaking those silences was life itself, but they knew and understood that breaking silences was a first and recurrent step in breaking bondage. As Olga Idriss David said: "The stories and lives of Black women in America have always been transformational. From colonization to present day, Black women have constructed and reshaped social reality within contexts that allow them to survive in a system bent on denying them freedom, equality, and being-ness in the world." She and Atwater

also both point out that slave narratives can be used to “situate our rhetorical tradition and reveal how present-day readers continue the transformational legacy toward a rhetoric of humanity.” Atwater clearly demonstrated the need for breaking of the same silence in the documentation of the history of the Civil Rights Movement not only of earlier United States history but of the 20th century as well. She expressed this power of breaking long silences that stretched into the modern civil rights era as she opened the 1996 special edition of the *Journal of Black Studies* on “The Voices of African American Women in the Civil Rights Movement” by reminding the readers that African American women have played significant roles in the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality. They have organized and led struggles for suffrage, for anti-lynching laws, for full employment, and against Jim Crow laws. The civil rights movement was merely a continuation of a longstanding tradition. However, there are few published accounts of the civil rights era that document the major role that women played in the movement” (540).

This has been a major silencing in the history of anti-racist struggle and serves a secondary role that, by default, pits feminism and the struggle for rights of women as one devoid of racial dynamics and perpetuates bondage within those social constructs. The breaking of silence by honoring the women who created the movement for justice based on social status, whether it was race, gender, sexuality, economic status or other marginalizing constructs is profound. Atwater stated that the collection was the journal’s way of trying to reverse that and pay homage to “the brave and courageous African American women who dedicated their lives and indeed their very souls for the advancement of African Americans and all people of this country.” The hope for the volume was that “their voices will be heard and appreciated” (542).

This transformational aspect of breaking silence leads to the same sense of honest and courageous communication that we found trailing the silence breaking in Allen's research on organizational communication.

Houston connects space claiming and reclamation to remembering and honoring in her description of a notion put forth by Sonja Foss that "women have learned to respond to previous scholarship in a traditional, patriarchal manner, justifying our work by refuting or negative that of others (for example, beginning an article by pointing to the inadequacy of previous research). Houston recalls that Foss explained this as a "No,...but" response to others, work and suggested that feminists should affirm and extend one another's work by giving "Yes,...and" responses." ("Difficult Dialogues" 5). Houston claims space in feminist scholarship and stresses the importance of remembering and honoring not only the scholars but also those who have participated in communication research as so-called subjects. She discusses this in her article "Feminist Theory and Black Women's Talk" reflecting on her stance as a feminist scholar with a loyalty to a feminist methodology that called for a removal of silences allowing research participants to claim space alongside researchers and be heard, remembered and honored. She wrote that she recognized a need for an accounting of silence, some form of reckoning that expressed listening even in the absence of speech. In this way, she affirms silence as voice that in this sense may have been functioning in the political realm in the form of unanswered questions with the outcome of raising more questions for her as a researcher. That is to say, the silence confirmed for her a need to dig deeper; it confirmed that there were more questions to consider, spaces that had not been entered properly or at all. This is a revolutionary application of feminist research in that it considers this not just a function of gender identity but as potentially an

expression of it in intersectional context and calls for an expansion of that linear framework Crenshaw dispels.

The theme of intersectionality also emerges in Feminist Theory and Black Women's Talk as she states firmly that "Willingness to acknowledge that Black women's membership in two, sometimes three, of the least powerful social groups in the United States creates for them unique experiences of womanhood, and women's talk is a positive development in women's studies in communication" (188). Unfortunately, this recognition of diversity appears not to have influenced choices about the demographic composition of participants in the majority of research of language and gender and has not often been reflected in the generalizations about "women's speech" based on that research.

Houston also found this hallmark in her research with W. Barnett Pearce on communication strategies used by people in the perceived lower strata of social groups as they documented the interpersonal and intercultural history from below by privileging the experiences and strategies of the actors "talking to the man." She also finds in her research that "Most of the respondents resisted and transcended stereotypic perceptions of Black women's talk to offer alternative descriptions that spoke to the self-affirming interpersonal qualities that they considered central to their communication styles" (49). She calls these celebratory responses or celebrating the ability to speak from the intersection. This celebration is present in speech of Black women Houston studied as well as women who honored her.

The 2005 honoring of Houston by the women's division of NCA is a significant event because there became a public commemoration and acknowledgment of her engagement in intersectional research, life in the intersection of academia and fight for life in the academic arena. A lot of the experiences that are described in the documenting of this event are

experiences I have had or had shared with me by other scholars of color. The description of her graduate seminar in 1979 was strikingly similar to one I had at Duquesne nearly 30 years later. I was moved to find that what she had done with these experiences was to write and dedicate herself to uplift. More importantly, I learned that it is ok to speak openly and freely about what went down and why you think it went down. I learned that others will stand with you and testify about the strength it took to persevere and when we do that together, we embody rhetorical intersectionality by talking back, reclaiming, remembering, recalling and commemorating the occasions of both triumph and defeat.

In her work “Seeking Difference: African-Americans in Interpersonal Communication Research, 1975-2000” Houston examines a representational intersectionality theme. Houston states that over representing Black people’s relationships with White colleagues, friends etc. had led to an inadvertent centering of Whiteness in African-American interpersonal communication scholarship. Olga Idriss Davis described a near direct translation of *sankofa* in Houston’s work saying that Houston was “reaching back and bringing forth a new wave of Black feminist scholars who have taken on her transformational and libratory spirit in their own scholarship.” (“Giving”)

her essay “Beyond Survival on Campus: Envisioning Communication Studies at Women-Centered Universities” Houston is proposing a solution. She presents this document as a plan for a university that is both powerful and empowers intersectional representatives. When she addresses communication as a discipline, she is unafraid to center its study and weave it into mission that addresses students holistically stating that “the study of communication concepts and skills” will be present in in the academic core. The presence of communication as a mission critical element of this university necessitates that it pays strict attention to the need to endow

students with not just information about “the politics of women’s past and present” but also the courage and ability to take on the mantle of being “articulate spokespersons for issues of human liberation in the future.” (“Beyond Survival” 340). She expressed that some will find here proposal “outrageous and distasteful” (342) while others still will find it is not progressive enough. There she recognizes her position in the intersection. She also recognizes the importance of a futurism that engages the public sphere as we experience it in real time. In an article that examined the nomination of Lani Guinier to the position of Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights in 1993, Houston saw Guinier’s facing of intense media scrutiny as a signal of a new area of research that would require pursuit. In the article that investigates intersectionality as it relates to the placement of Harriet Tubman on the \$20 bill, the author wrote “Intersectionality, as developed in Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw’s (1991) germinal piece on the subject, invites an understanding of a subject that accounts for the distinct but interrelated influences different identity categories such as gender, race, and class have on individuals. By foregrounding a particular social identity in a given context, other social identities are de-emphasized, and their influence ignored. Crenshaw concludes that effective scholarship and public policy would include an understanding of the way that different social identities buffer, or compound, marginalization when taken together” (241). This interpretation of Crenshaw’s foundation seems to pull intersectionality away from the oppressive forces and reconstruct it as a framework that can be more than those oppressions but also as a challenge or liberator reclaiming an identity nexus in which all of our parts are important. In this article we also find emphasis on intersectionality as a lens and a personal status “Taken together, these voices emphasize Tubman’s intersectional status as an enslaved female exploited through extreme, unregulated capitalism, to critique the memorial process” (244).

These linkages are evident in several praxis-based or applied communication work as well. In some cases, the breaking of silence is explicit as is the connection to intersectionality. In others, these may be disconnected. A more concerted effort to highlight this in an array of studies that gather with Allen, Atwater and Houston in the intersection is needed. In the following section, I highlight the Critical Resistance prison literature that discuss communication in praxis and build on the same theoretical premise of a persuasion through intersectionality that reverses oppression by breaking silences. These works reveal the power to identify bondage and call for freedom. They focus specifically on the bondage of imprisonment in the United States and the need to break long silences surrounding it.

#### Reclaiming Rhetorical Intersectionality by Examining and Breaking Silence

In this chapter, I first examined theories of silence from the works of Audre Lorde, Cheryl Glenn and, Robin Patric Clair. The relationships between silence, power, and bondage are steeped structural, political, and representational intersectionality. Silencing has served and continues to serve as a reinforcement for systems of holding people in margins and spaces of oppression (Glenn). Silencing has also been used to isolate and separate people from one another keeping them in communicative bondage. This is well documented in the remembrances of formerly enslaved people who participated in the interviews and photography of the Federal Writers Project of 1936. The project produced a body of first-hand accounts entitled *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936 to 1938*. After a historically situated exploration of theories of silence and power, I detailed the theories and contributions of Allen, Atwater, and Houston in articulating more on examining silence and breaking it to reclaim rhetorical intersectionality.



Rhetorical intersectionality calls for honoring and acknowledging others in the intersection, especially people experiencing the weight of it. Rhetorical intersectionality engages a remembering and honoring of other women of the intersection to uplift not only those who find ourselves here now but also those who work so tirelessly to help us. Rhetorical intersectionality scholarship is explicitly aware of women who have written about and experienced the intersection before. A hallmark of rhetorical intersectionality is remembering these women and honoring them whether they be known or unknown. This remembering and honoring recognizes a starting point that is not above on the lofty pedestals where we tend to place our heroines but rather below in the roots and soil where the ability to raise our voices was sewn with literal blood, sweat and tears. The work of scholars engaging in rhetorical intersectionality is careful to remember intersectional paragons like Sojourner Truth who's "Ain't I A Woman" speech is considered intersectional canon as well as the legions of unnamed women surviving in the intersection with courageous living of everyday acts. Again, remembering also includes women we do not have documentation of as well as women in our personal lives who influenced us with actions that were private and ordinary which we realize we must honor publicly and recognize as historically significant. Rhetorical intersectionality recognizes its importance and practitioners implement it through practices that explore it and oftentimes break long silences in and around history of experiences. Rhetorical intersectionality also practices *sankofa* by imagining a future where margins are constantly challenged, and structures can be dismantled - unformed rather than reformed. Rhetorical intersectionality calls for honoring and acknowledging others in the intersection, especially people experiencing the weight of it. *Parrhesia* calls for acknowledgment of the language that has helped us recognize and define the intersection as well as those who introduced the language.

The courage to speak truth to power and speak with the conviction of fullness and direction of *parrhesia* is critical to the phase of rhetorical intersectionality that encompasses speech after silence-breaking. Allen, Atwater and Houston's rhetorical intersectionality iterations join a communication theory set in motion by Gadamer and Ricoeur's notions that historicity is reinforced in our cultural narratives. This means that even the dialogue of prison abolition would prove itself steeped in a historical narrative that must be recognized. That narrative has its own intersectional implications as profound as the ones that emerge from the discourse itself. That narrative for Davis and many members of CR is slavery. For Griffith, it is also slavery but not just a physical and psychological form of it. Griffith is also concerned with spiritual enslavement.

The link Davis and Griffith make from slavery to imprisonment in the United States is one that requires a kairotic lens. Enslavement provided an economic stronghold in many states. Not having a replacement for that system left the southern economy on its knees. As America grappled with its status as a new nation, the intersections of politics, industry and social movement produced an opportunistic moment. The discourse of the time ruptured open a set of public spheres that allowed Jim Crow laws and a national code that reinforced the racism intertwined with the system of slavery. With slavery outlawed under the 13th amendment except in cases where a person had committed a crime, a new set of systems arose. Douglas Blackmon explores convict leasing as one such system in his work, *Slavery by Another Name*. Under convict leasing systems, state correctional institutions - jails, prisons, workhouses, etc. could legally lease their inmates to business owners in need of hard labor. But where would they get all of these criminals? The same place where they had always gotten free labor. Criminal was simply a new term for Black. And to reinforce this the laws and codes needed were developed to

target this synonym. To be Black was in and of itself the ultimate crime. This was an ontological crime that merely needed a language and meaning structure for support. Violations included being “uppity” vagrancy, and unemployment (Blackmon 56). Highly subjective and easily manipulated, these codes were designed to fit Black people. A White person born with the inalienable right of Manifest Destiny could not possibly be accused of being "uppity". 98% of the people arrested for vagrancy were Black men. Unemployment was a direct effect of the abolition of enslavement. To criminalize this was merely to reverse the order of logic. Rather than accept slavery as being illegal, we now had a system of laws that made it illegal to be free. Convict leasing existed until 1948.

The Kligman retinol experiments at the Holmesburg Prison from 1952 to 1974 are an extension of the convict leasing system and in fact follow a pattern of shifts in human trafficking. The Western economic paradigm shifted from being one based on specialty and use value of goods or services to being one of consumerism and exchange value of goods or services. Despite that change, we still find that people are bought and sold. The purchases had been made for use value - how much labor could be extracted from the person. As WWII confirmed industrialism and the rise of global capitalist agendas, the buying and selling of people still included their use but began to see a dramatic shift toward exchange value - how much cash or capital could be stocked from the person. One way in which this is apparent is in the use of prisoners for pharmaceutical and chemical experiments. We must consider the possibility that this methodology of using flesh for capital business purposes was even fortified by the continuing Holocaust America waged on its own lower caste. In the Holmesburg case, Dr. Kligman used the prisoners to conduct trials for a skin drug. He saw the prison inmates as fertile ground referring to them as “acres of skin”.

These systems demonstrate that American society had accepted prisons as natural parts of our social and economic landscape. The narratives have persistently discouraged discourse on alternatives and protected prisons as an embodiment of cultural norms like human trafficking, racism and sexism. The abolitionists of today are careful to call upon those persistent norms because they are one of the ways in which a new public sphere of discussion is formed. These norms are upheld in recalcitrance even among the very victims of these old racist and sexist ideologies who have been subjects of a discourse that would redefine their victimhood in a language that identifies criminality internally and seeks to eliminate the visibility of broader context or historical narrative.

Inclusion in this dialogue is a sincere paradox in that the very core of this public sphere, prisoners themselves, are many times not entitled to speech either by moral devaluing of their speech acts or by actual restraint. This can occur both external of the discourse and internally at intercultural crossroads. Angela Davis acknowledges multicultural dimensions in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* with her inquiry about the relationship between historical expressions of racism and the role of the prison system today. She reminded readers that there are other racialized histories that have affected the development of the American punishment system as well. While in some activism circles, this becomes a point of diversion and divisiveness, Davis specifically mentions the histories of Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian Americans and states that these racisms, like anti-Black racism, also congeal and combine in the prison. (*Are Prisons Obsolete?* 35). Davis is also takes on a rhetorical intersectionality stance in examining the prevailing feminist track of the discourse noting the need for unity here too as she noted that advocating for gender equality when it comes to imprisonment should naturally coalesce with advocating for justice for everyone imprisoned. Here she engages Tekla Miller's challenges to the Michigan correctional

differences in male and female prison standards. She argues that the case for gender equality among prisoners is flawed noting that “a more productive version of feminism would question the organization of state punishment for men and that the institution as a whole-gendered as it is-calls for the kind of critique that might lead us to consider its abolition (Are Prisons Obsolete? 75).

The challenge to imprisonment in the United States and its course along the lines of enslavement is an example of the silence breaking rhetorical intersectionality features at work. Davis, Griffith and CR writers remember the roots of imprisonment, conceive a future without mass incarceration and break the stigmatized silence of being a prisoner. Their approach demonstrates the power of rhetorical intersectionality to unify and uplift in activism asserting that inclusion is a necessary stance for true freedom. They do this with their methods of discourse including text in many languages and forms (like Zheng’s poem which includes some Spanish) and then at their assessments of linguistic paradigms. This silence breaking component of rhetorical intersectionality has deep communication ethics implications because it asks the public to reconfigure and, in some instances, co-construct the language we use to engage in dialogue and discourse. In the concluding article of Abolition Now! Raedeen Keahiolalo-Karasuda ends her discussion on a prison abolition movement in Hawaii with this statement that sums up the link between the rhetorical intersectionality features I discussed in the earlier part of the chapter and the activism here:

We live under a regime of deliberate silence regarding the standardized containment and punishment of entire groups of people...Going forward, our goals must be to increase political literacy and create ways of hearing, understanding and responding to the voices and experiences of those most intimately familiar with the prison industrial complex (132).

Communication scholars suggest ways to achieve a more attentive collection of work.

Communication scholar Carrie Crenshaw explained “To do this, scholars must locate interactions that implicate unspoken issues of race, discursive spaces where the power of whiteness is invoked but its explicit terminology is not, and investigate how these racialized constructions intersect with gender and class” (“Resisting” 245). Vardeman-Winter et al suggest ways “intersectionality questions some fundamental public relations concepts” (281) They identify their self-standpoints as Carrie Crenshaw calls upon scholars to do in her article. They hold that “current public relations research and practice is limited because of the dominance of the traditional paradigm of publics’ identity as comprised of discrete communication (284).

Carrie Crenshaw’s body of work and examination of artifacts like the journalism surrounding women in the Gulf War assert rhetorical intersectionality as a way forward for feminist rhetorical criticism that not only emphasizes equality of women and men but the equality of women and other women. This principle of *ubuntu* that we see exhibited throughout the work of Allen, Atwater and Houston places Carrie Crenshaw in the same soil as her namesake giving life to the healing power of intersectionality through a rhetorical approach.

Prison abolitionism is severely impacted by intercultural dialogue needs from the racial justice issues to the concerns of Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex and Asexual communities, immigrant communities, and feminist activists. This is expressly defined in the work that focuses on communication and discourse by Angela Y. Davis and the Critical Resistance (CR) movement that grew out support for her during her political persecution and imprisonment from 1970 -1972 detailed in her book *If They Come in The Morning*. Lee Griffith defines prison abolition discourse as an artifact of religious communication. Imprisonment is one of the core institutions of both ideological state apparatuses and repressive ones. The distinction

between the two being that repressive forms of bourgeois apparatus are ones that advance via violence. Prisons reinforce the structures of ideological reasoning of the necessity of punishment and the root of criminal behavior being the criminals themselves. Moreover, they also support, the ideological assumptions of capitalism and racism. The evidence of prisons as a repressive (violent) means of maintaining order is clearly demonstrated in Davis' work *The Meaning of Freedom* in which she charges, "prisons, of course, thrive on class inequalities, they thrive on racial inequalities, they thrive of gender inequalities. They produce and reproduce those inequalities" (156).

Davis then explained that prisons and the economic support of the prison system are components of the state apparatus and are affected by that apparatus. One example of this she gives comes from a fellow scholar, Marc Mauer, who wrote about the "collateral consequences" of felony imprisonment. One such consequence is disenfranchisement. Defining a crime as a felony and imprisoning a person as such then touches the voting apparatus, as those people are now unable to participate in that fundamental democratic process. Their disenfranchisement points to a bourgeois state. Education is another piece of the apparatus that is examined here. Education, mental health facilities and equitable housing are other state apparatus institutions that may be pitted as alternative systems we could use that would not require the complete abolition of prisons. Davis points out that prisons divert funds away from these systems and without proper funding for them, we cannot expect that they would be alternatives. Davis is concerned with dialogue on freedom, change in philosophical views and a collective, meaning not just programs or strategies that call for reduction of numbers of people imprisoned. Griffith argues that prisons are only one location of the social order that produces a mindset of criminality. He draws similarities between the practices of imprisonment in America and those of

“the old Soviet practice of using mental hospitals for the imprisonment of wide-ranging categories of offenders and dissidents” (54). His opening of a discussion here about dissidence lets us understand that the rights of expression are critical in his work. He challenges the “rehabilitative motif” as a veneer for institution of social control and engineering. Griffith ties in a sociological study showing that the use of full paralytics or psycho-paralytics were most frequently prescribed by physicians or physician assistants coerced by officers or guards whose documented reasons were religious activity (most notably Black Muslims) or open gay practices. Griffith also highlighted the lack of free expression in the post-incarceration hopes of the lives of prisoners:

A game is played out as prisoners facing parole hearings scurry to enroll in programs and complete classes to convince those who will judge them that they have become “model prisoner”. The question of whether being a “model prisoner” is even remotely related to being able to live a peaceful and fulfilled life beyond the prison walls is inconsequential to the whole process” (48).

Then, just as Davis calls on the expertise of Mauer to discuss her position thereby pushing past the marginalization of her intersectional position, Griffith calls on C.S. Lewis as a mainstream cultural expert to demarginalize his claims. He offers Lewis’ essay “The Humanitarian Theory of Punishment” as ethos for the discussion, highlighting a passage in the essay in which Lewis muses that “tyrannies” in which humans are subjugated for the supposed purpose of making them “good” may be the most oppressive. Griffith draws us to conclude that a prison system that subjugates inhabitants on the grounds that this is for their own good are not utilitarian at all but majorly immoral and problematic. This rhetorical intersectionality then becomes a silence breaking breaks bondage and establishes itself in the realm of ethics and freedom. It seeks a freedom not only of bodies but also of voices and dialogues that pool inward, outward and create



multilogues. There are many examples wherein the literature of prison abolition demonstrates this call for freedom of voice and mind.

Activist and former prisoner Eddy Zheng includes a poem in CR's anthology *Abolition Now!* that responds to public opinion about his own case. The poem highlights incidents of him creating his own freedom during his incarceration. The poem also highlights moments where this was challenged such as a time when he was granted parole but had it fall through due to a change in the state's governorship that allowed for review and revocation of paroles. As he expressed in the poem that the acts of learning and speech are where he found freedom, he cites his ability to read saying "the Prison Industrial Complex and its masters attempted to control my mind, it didn't work...I had about a hundred books in my cell (41). Zheng continued "I called myself a poet to motivate me to write because I knew poets would set us free." Again freedom is tied to voice and the refusal to be silent. The prison abolition writings here are advocating an understanding of freedom that would indicate a shift in the dominant narrative and communicating against the structural and political intersectionality described in Zheng's account. Griffith brings silence breaking into religious communication literature when he asserted that freedom is inherent in the gospel of the testimonies of Christ. He clarifies his position writing that the "biblical proclamation of liberty for the captives is a call to freedom in the face of fear and in the face of our obsessive quest for security...But it is also freedom to respond with nonviolent creativity" (189). He supports prison abolition because the use of "cages, chains, pits, dungeons, jails and prisons are biblically identified with the power and spirit of death. They are totally and irrevocably renounced" (189). In Griffith's call to redefine freedom, the basis is the spiritual idea that Jesus Christ has proclaimed liberty for all captives and though the sociological reasons for prison abolition are also important to him, the spiritual ones are paramount. Again,

the movement of this long silence beyond the intersections of race, class and gender signal further demarginalization and the very democratization of intersectionality called for by Patricia Hill Collins in her theoretical work. That democratization is rooted in the freedom of voice first; a freedom that creates a multiplicity of voices and exchanges, multilogues, exploring ways to combat inequities in imprisonment. These multilogues have grown into discourses that cry for justice and detailed examination.

The discourse is not only intersectional in terms of who is involved based on social background but is also interdisciplinary, pulling from psychology, religion, political science, sociology and history. The disciplines are connected by an underlying public question that each rhetor must engage at some point making communication the thread that weaves these ideas together and connects them to praxis. Brenda Allen makes an important recommendation for doing this in “Translating Organizational Communication Scholarship into Practice”:

In addition to applying scholarship to teaching, we can apply scholarship as we perform other duties within our departments. For example, as we participate in the numerous meetings that form such an inevitable part of our work life, we can share knowledge about a variety of topics (e.g., policy development, socialization processes, team building, and decision-making strategies). We also can advise our colleagues as we grapple with day-to-day operations as well as unusual occurrences such as change initiatives. In essence, we can strive to improve internal communication processes as well as maintain a positive, productive work environment. We can branch out from our home departments into other segments of the university to conduct practical research (102-103).

Joan Morgan began writing about Black male sexism “and the conspiracy of silence that surrounds it” in the 1990’s. She ended the decade with her breaking silence wide open book *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip Hop Feminist Breaks It Down*. This book alongside the more academic work of Tricia Rose in *Black Noise* were like jets through the sound barrier in their time. They recognized nearly twenty years of silence during which women made their way in hip hop as an artistic and political arena. They recognized that not all of those

ways had been smooth paths and that some of them had been downright misogynistic. They knew that no matter how many Queen Latifah and Monie Love “Ladies First” cuts we got, the representational intersectionality of art like 2 Live Crew’s Nasty As They Wanna Be was enough to call for voice. Morgan and Rose were at the forefront of a huge group of women who continued to break silences and listen to other women in the intersection with them.

Each of these challenges, to each other and to systems of domination, are only a few of the ways in which silence is shattered as oppression and reorganized as resistance. We need to listen to the silences and let the silence speak.” The prison abolition discourse found in the works of Davis, Griffith and CR is firmly planted in the silence breaking markers of rhetorical intersectionality. Rhetorical intersectionality lays claim to spaces where these voices have been drowned out, remembers voices from the past and honors unsung heroes. Rhetorical intersectionality practices what historian Lucien Febvre called “history from below” (Ruggiu 124) by considering the narratives of people who have been marginalized, people left out of disciplinary canon, and people engaged in everyday ordinary activities contributing to history.

Rhetorical intersectionality has a commitment to inclusion. Rhetorical intersectionality is guided by *sankofa*, a West African principle often represented by a bird with an egg in its mouth looking backward. The idea of *sankofa* is that in attending the past and analyzing it, we must also put it to work in caring for our future (Asante and Mazama, Karenga). Rhetorical intersectionality imagines a future where margins are constantly challenged, and structures can be dismantled - unformed rather than reformed.

There are many opportunities to extend the rhetorical intersectionality of breaking long silences to affect communicative engagement in lived experience. Rhetorical intersectionality does this to imagine a future where silences are not so long, margins are constantly challenged, and

structures can be dismantled - unformed rather than reformed. Rhetorical intersectionality calls for honoring and acknowledging others in the intersection, especially people experiencing the weight of it.

Rhetorical intersectionality engages a remembering and honoring of other women of the intersection to uplift not only those who find ourselves here now but also those who work so tirelessly to help us. Rhetorical intersectionality scholarship is explicitly aware of women who have written about and experienced the intersection before. A hallmark of rhetorical intersectionality is remembering these women and honoring them whether they be known or unknown. This remembering and honoring recognizes a starting point that is not above on the lofty pedestals where we tend to place our heroines but rather below in the roots and soil where the ability to raise our voices was sewn with literal blood, sweat and tears. The work of scholars engaging in rhetorical intersectionality is careful to remember intersectional paragons like Sojourner Truth who's "Ain't I A Woman" speech is considered intersectional canon as well as the legions of unnamed women surviving in the intersection with courageous living of everyday acts. Again, remembering also includes women we do not have documentation of as well as women in our personal lives who influenced us with actions that were private and ordinary which we realize we must honor publicly and recognize as historically significant. Rhetorical intersectionality recognizes its importance and practitioners implement it through practices that explore it and oftentimes break long silences in and around history of experiences. Rhetorical intersectionality also practices *sankofa* by imagining a future where margins are constantly challenged, and structures can be dismantled - unformed rather than reformed. Rhetorical intersectionality calls for honoring and acknowledging others in the intersection, especially

people experiencing the weight of it. *Parrhesia* calls for acknowledgment of the language that has helped us recognize and define the intersection as well as those who introduced the language.

### CHAPTER THREE:

#### *PARRHESIA* AND INTERSECTIONALITY

In a series of lectures delivered in 1983 at the University of California at Berkeley, Michel Foucault traced the history of *parrhesia* to ancient Greek origins and theorized the nature of it in real situations a speaker may encounter. He noted the origins of *parrhesia* in plays and style adopted by Greek thespians and rhetors. Foucault translated it as the act of speaking fully or saying everything. He also noted in *Discourse and Truth: the Problematization of Parrhesia* that in the 20th century he found it generally translated as “free speech” and distinguished it from the translation of *parrhesiastes* which he found to be explicitly referencing a person who speaks the truth. He posited this kind of speech as a speech that was honest in the face of extreme threat such as torture or death.

#### Key Terms and Scholars

*Parrhesia* is the central metaphor of this chapter. In addition to Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston, there are some key scholars who inform the issues and ideas of silence. Michel Foucault, Gerard Hauser, and Anna Julia Cooper are among the scholars whose contributions foster a discussion of *parrhesia* and intersectionality. The following is a small group of terms that appear frequently in their works and in this chapter.

***Parrhesia.*** The definition of *parrhesia* in this study is taken from Michel Foucault as “a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to the truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself)” (19). David Novak writes about the possibility of *parrhesia* in democracy and upholds Malcolm X as a *parrhesiastes* in a democracy. It is unclear

as to whether Foucault might have considered the democracy of Malcolm X's America an authentic democracy. However, for the purposes of this project, I have positioned *parrhesia* within democracy as a possibility that is in line with Foucault's thinking.

**Courage.** Courage is a willingness to take action (including speech action) in the face of fear of danger or lack of protection. Courage is a central component of *parrhesia* as *parrhesiastes* (those who speak truth to power in the face of danger are practitioners of speech-act courage).

**Reclamation.** Rhetorical intersectionality reclaims elements of temporal, spatial and narrative natures where voices have been drowned out. With this reclamation, rhetorical intersectionality remembers voices from the past and honors unsung heroes. Rhetorical intersectionality values *parrhesia*. Rhetorical intersectionality does not ignore data or the majesty of empirical research, but it is historically aware of the dangers that come with divorcing human narratives from these data.

Rather than allow the space of intersectionality to remain in the margins, Marsha Houston consistently collects the voices and concerns in an open formatted written space. She moves the intersection, opens it and expands space for women to join together rather than be separated. This includes women we cannot actually name because we do not know their names as well as women in our personal lives who influenced us with actions that were private and ordinary which we realize we must honor publicly and recognize as historically significant. Houston eloquently opens her dissertation with a tribute to them: "This dissertation is dedicated to the Black women of my girlhood, my mother, my sisters, my teachers -- my role models--from whom I learned that Black womanhood speaks with many voices" (iv). Houston is practicing history from below and honoring women whose positions so often go unnoticed.

Olga Idriss Davis sheds light on this dominant thread of Houston's scholarship in her honor of her at the 2005 NCA convention noting that Houston has "written her way through the struggle for survival in the academy by illuminating, raising consciousness, speaking out boldly and decisively on the public and private spheres of Black women's communication historically and in contemporary life." ("Giving") Davis is honoring Houston and delivers this epideictic in the tradition of silence breaking by adding Houston to the praise of "the ancestral foremothers - located among the ranks of Phillis Wheatley, Ida B. Wells, and the enslaved Black women of the 19th century" ("Giving"). Davis' assertions support that this path was fraught with physical, spiritual and intellectual danger yet these women persevered becoming both theorizers and practitioners of rhetorical intersectionality. Like Allen and Atwater, Houston firmly establishes remembering and honoring as a hallmark of rhetorical intersectionality. With this, they reverse structural, political, and representational intersectionality with rhetorical intersectionality that is decked with several of the attributes defined in chapter one. These include author awareness, industry exposure, claiming space in areas of scholarship where voices are silenced or drowned out, remembering voices from the past and honoring unsung heroes. Houston considers the narratives of people who have been marginalized, people left out of disciplinary canon, and people engaged in everyday ordinary activities contributing to history.

**Truth.** This project does not approach large scale philosophical discussions of truth. Instead the definition is posited in a simple manner. Truth is the statement of facts, definitions, qualities and issues that have constituted the experiences of a person's life.

**Public Sphere.** The idea of a public or public sphere has been defined in many different ways. They include notions of a group or groups of people organized around or interested in a particular issue; governed by a set of rules; or even people engaged in a discussion. Ideas about



the public grew and morphed over the periods of modernity and the rise of post-modernity. In the early 20th century, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Walter Lippmann, even proposed that the public was not a real entity but rather a rhetorical device invented as a manner of maintaining governance. Philosopher and educational theorist John Dewey answered this claim in his treatise *The Public and Its Problems* in which he asserted that the public is not a “phantom” but rather a real body of people who deserve commitment to democratic process and that the public’s ability to successfully participate in democracy hinged on access to education and open communication. Jurgen Habermas introduced the idea that the public sphere had transformed into less a formal body of political actors and more an informal network of people having conversations in places of privilege.

***Author-Community Awareness.*** Rhetorical intersectionality also recognizes the need for research whose audience is broader than a committee of readers or editors. Houston connects author awareness to community awareness and opens space for both in a display of rhetorical intersectionality. She wrote:

In my work, I endeavor to move away from the entrenched individualism of most approaches to face-to-face talk toward a more social and collective conceptualization that is compatible with African-American women's lived experiences. When compared to more reductive approaches, I consider this approach to increase the potential that research can mirror the complex ways in which social actors experience interpersonal encounters. For us to learn what is truly human about human communication, we must take a full, fair, accurate account of the communicative experiences of those subordinated ethnic groups whom our pedagogy, theories, research agenda, and research methods have previously excluded, marginalized, or misrepresented (684).

Gerard Hauser proposes the public sphere as being rhetorical in nature, built around discussions and conversations of interest in vernaculars. Hauser argues for the public sphere as a nested domain of particularized arenas or multiple spheres populated by participants who, by adherence to standards of reasonableness reflected in the vernacular language of conversational communication, discover their interests, where they converge or differ, and how their differences might be accommodated (56).

***Nhiwatiwa Wheel.*** The *Nhiwatiwa* wheel is a metaphor for community involved communication. Unlike traditional Western models of rhetoric, it resists distinctions between audience and speaker, requiring the active participation of speakers and listeners at various points to legitimate the oratory. Deborah Atwater introduces the *Nhiwatiwa* wheel as a model for investigating Black communication issues.

***Ubuntu.*** This is a term that points to the human quality of connectedness and is often loosely translated as “I am because we are” (Gade 485, Asante). Aime Cesaire poses an understanding of this worldview as negritude: “I have always recognized that what was happening to my brothers in Algeria and the United States had its repercussions in me” (92).

#### Some Theories of *Parrhesia*

##### Fearless Speech

At the intersection, this threat exists on many levels and physical harm for speaking is historically a possibility that has implications far beyond the safety of the woman of color as the speaker. The threat of death or bodily harm extends to her children, her lovers and her community. When Black women choose a path of fearless speech, they are choosing a path that is dangerous in the Southern African philosophical context of *ubuntu*. Deborah Atwater wrote that “African-American women continued to write and speak out about their standing in society,

although at times, it was dangerous for them to do so” (28). “Maria Stewart compels the women in the audience to take the challenge of raising the expectations of a new generation to make sure that all men and women are equal no matter what race or skin color. Because of her appearances and the nature of her speeches, she decided for her own safety, it would be best to leave town” (31).

Anna Julia Cooper was a scholar in the 19th and early 20th centuries who embodied intersectionality without using the term specifically (as we recall Crenshaw is the first person to use the term to describe the phenomenon of oppression along multiple identity lines). Dr. Cooper wrote the seminal work *A Voice from the South* in which she eloquently declared that in the metaphor of justice:

One important witness has not yet been heard from. The summing up of the evidence deposed, and the charge to the jury have been made--but no word from the Black Woman. It is because I believe the American people to be conscientiously committed to a fair trial and ungarbled evidence, and because I feel it essential to a perfect understanding and an equitable verdict that truth from each standpoint be presented at the bar,--that this little Voice, has been added to the already full chorus (II).

*Parrhesia* is more than speaking frankly to authority without interest in persuading. It is more than conveying information. It is speaking truth that is grounded in fact and conviction. The *parrhesiastes* speaks the truth first because he or she must as an obligation to himself or herself, but also to speak it to the other, who may not want to hear it. *Parrhesia* is not soliloquy; it has an audience, there is the possibility of change” (Hauser Prisoners 67).

Atwater’s example of Gloria Richardson’s work is an example of how living in truth was an act that dealt with intersectionality issues and bravely confronted oppressive forces of it. Atwater cites Paula Giddings’ account of Richardson as someone who Black male activists had trouble uniting with because they saw her as a “castrator” and “rejected her as a leader because

of what they perceived as inappropriate gender or women's behavior" (95). Richardson's leadership was a complex intersectionality case in that she came from a middle-class college-educated background. This background was perceived as one of privilege and she was therefore couched by mainstream media as someone who could not truly relate to or present a positive force for understanding the racial struggles she was fighting for justice in. In this way she was missing the requisite class background seen as part of race struggle and portrayed as someone more in line with feminist struggle. The problem with this is that it can make one feel pressure to choose whether to be part of a racial justice or gender justice movement as though it is impossible to be part of both. The most telling assumption about this is that class at least in this case, is thus more associated with Blackness than it is with womanhood.

### Code-Switching

Atwater and Asante reveal that "at least two methods of discourse are open to the receiver in opposition to the speaking power" (176). Atwater and Asante "Since power finds its efficacy in acquiescence, messages structured in a hierarchical manner reduce the leverage of audience to respond to an incomplete or fragmentary discourse" (173). (1) substituting a more reasonable position for a less reasonable one. (2) guerilla rhetoric which we define as the multifrontal verbal attacks on the structural symbol of the speaking power itself. "The receiver who employs a substitute discourse or guerilla rhetoric successfully against the voice of force so that voice of power itself falls silent must guard against the inevitable temptation to employ the same discourse tactics as the fallen force" (177).

The valuing of this can be seen in stark plainness in the Anglo customs of taking sworn testimony during legal proceedings that ask the testifier to swear that s/he will "tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." The value of this is seen as a commonplace in Western,

particularly U.S., culture. But Foucault posited that *parrhesia* was more than just truth telling. He asserted that it was truth telling in the face of risk and with courage to face potential threats and dangers that may ensue because of power relationships involved. Speaking in the midst of the forces described by Crenshaw that make intersectionality a place of danger is an act of *parrhesia*. Courage is gathered from the silence-breaking as rhetors pull from the rich heritage of oration remembered, reclaimed and restored from those who are honored. And privileging the full testament is a necessary act of faith in the unseen but hoped for in an intersectional future. Embracing intersectionality as a position and using it to promote and protect humanity requires fullness of speech because the intersection itself is about fullness of experience and the dangerous precarious nature of that experience. This is beautifully realized by Cherrie Moraga as she recalls reflecting on her education and the notion of courage. A friend pointed out to her that most of the people Moraga had gone to school with were “White and rich.” Moraga reflects “It was true. All along I had felt the difference, but not until I had put the words ‘class’ and ‘color’ to the experience, did my feelings make any sense” (Moraga 26). She continues the reflection recognizing that she had become accustomed to challenging herself for not being enough of a *parrhesiastes* like her classmates - not being as “free” as they were noting that for years she “completely bought that they simply had more guts than I did - to rebel against their parents and run around the country hitch-hiking, reading books and studying art.” Once she recognized the disparity in backgrounds, Moraga realizes the difference in brave space being occupied and acknowledged the strength and bravery she had to call on to break her own silence recognizing that “women of color and working-class women often shrink from challenging White middle-class women” (28). She muses about privilege and her own experiences with passing as an intersectional phenomenon noting “I am a woman with a foot in both worlds; and I refuse the

split. I feel the necessity for dialogue. Sometimes I feel it urgently. But one voice is not enough, nor two, although this is where dialogue begins” (29). Moraga asserted that talking openly and honestly with one another and being a collective was “real power” suggesting that a commitment to *parrhesia* is necessary if we are to have real dialogue and thus liberation. This is a fundamentally communication-based position that rejects flimsy timid communication. Instead Moraga envisions the power of the intersection as being rooted in rich, questioning communication that is fearless and at the same time humble and aware of its own need for deeper reflection as she became aware of her own.

This communicative action stance is also expressed by Arneson as one of humility. She states “When one person approaches another person with an a-where-ness of humility, inter-a-where-ness is possible. Humility requires that a person not take her world as the only world...Inter-a-where-ness can bring about solidarity between people as they agree on particular interpretations” (*Communicative* 70) This willingness to explore the space between ourselves and our own experiences is where *parrhesia* flourishes because it is fed with awareness of one’s own position and how that position relates to and exists within a world of other positions. I refer to this as author-community awareness. *Parrhesia* gets light from a commitment to exposure. That exposure comes with risk which Foucault described as a defining feature of the *parrhesiastes*. The person speaking must be taking some risk in the speech-act. The speech and dialogue that arise from rhetorical intersectionality commit to *parrhesia* with both author-community awareness and exposure.

Brenda Allen: *Parrhesia*, Intersectionality and Organizational Communication

Allen’s scholarship deepens the grooves of those features and entrench their mark on the tradition. “We can branch out from our home departments into other segments of the university

to conduct practical research and offer services such as training or consulting. A few years ago, I implemented an organizational communication analysis of a student services department. Because I had interacted frequently with members of the department (e.g., to acquire information for students and as a member of job search committees) I brought a level of understanding, a history of relationships with employees, and a reputation of caring for students that facilitated data gathering and analyses. Members of the unit were highly receptive to my feedback, and they accepted many of my recommendations for change” (“Translating” 103).

“Twice Blessed Doubly Oppressed” is the lead car of Allen’s intersectionality work. Houston has built a body of rhetorical intersectionality work that breaks boundaries, questions and challenges both to push past intersections and take important looks at how they are constructed. This property of transcendence is a gift and invitation to scholars to open the field and expand our research. Houston has also remained committed to lived experience as a premier component of that research thereby assuring that rhetorical intersectionality is an instrument of uplift through a reverence for life and human dignity.

I especially urge organizational communication scholars to take a social constructionist approach to theorizing race, for several reasons. Organizations of varying types (e.g., corporations, government agencies, K-12 schools, universities, healthcare providers, nonprofit groups, and so forth) are prime sites of identity construction where people increasingly are interacting with racially different others, in a variety of capacities (including persons of color in roles of authority that Whites traditionally have occupied). Within these settings, formal and informal policies usually dictate that members enact dominant norms, linguistic codes, and communication styles during everyday interactions, which can lead to discrimination and conflict. In addition, organizations are often locales of documented cases and anecdotal narratives of racial strife. On a more positive note, many organizations are actively seeking to value diversity, usually with race as a high priority, due to population projections about increasing numbers of racial minorities. Thus, organizations are sites where members can develop and implement policies, programs, training, and so forth, to value racial differences, to counteract racism, and to facilitate antiracism (“Theorizing Communication and Race” 262).

One of the things I love about this passage is that she gives definition to the structures where intersections arise. I think too often in theoretical approaches we forget to name the sites of the theories. We forget to walk the humanities and human experiences into the marketplaces where they often emerged. This can act as somewhat of a mirror exercise to help construct new sites where the oppressive forces cannot gather the way they're used to – without talk back and without recognition from below. When scholars like Brenda Allen enter the field of organizational communication, we get contours that allow us to point and say “there” that is where it has happened. For example, often there are systems of hiring that depend on traditional checkpoints like committees, application processes, referrals and sometimes even straight promotions or appointments with no vetting. If we look from the intersection at these processes, we can recognize that they perpetuate structural oppression. But we often speak back from outside the site where the intersection put is in harm's way or hurt us. Organizational communication study can help us to begin to examine from within the scenes of the collision. Studies should include questions of communication (in)considerations. Words like “fit” and “corporate culture” often dog whistle to people who have traditionally been privileged in organizations. Holding candidate searches based on invitation or referral only can have the same affect. More oddly, going against these norms and demanding equal access can often be seen as an affront by people who would ordinarily have entitlement or claim to positions in organizations they expect to dominate. The reaction to equal access or equitable access becomes defense. This defense is a sign of privilege and, as with other diseases leaving bodies, often causes uproar and can wreak havoc. Intersectionality is not only the opportunities one does not get because we are overlooked and underpaid, it is also about the opportunities we do get and the price we pay to get and keep them. These include notions that we were not talented, that somehow actions taken to



hire us were skewed in our favor rather than actions taken to hire the legions of White men before us which were “fair and balanced choosing the best man for the job” Undermining and lack of respect for authority also ensue.

### Examining *Parrhesia* and Intersectionality

Marsha Houston has been open about her personal, career, and educational experiences. Sometimes this is layered into the work itself intertwined with research and evidence-based writing are her anecdotes of life as a scholar, mother and citizen. In other times the experiences are presented separately or even in other documents. In this way, she recognizes a tradition of writing that brackets personal experiences but also keeps a path in the literature open. Should readers decide to take the paths, they may lengthen their journeys in her work and broaden their understanding of the role she plays in combating oppressive forms of intersectionality. In this way, Houston contributes a foundational element of author awareness to her works and reverses the flow of political intersectionality. She encourages other scholars to embrace author awareness in their works as well as the need for their work to be community aware.

In her essay “Writing for My Life: Community-Cognizant Scholarship on African-American Women and Communication” Houston comes face to face with this need for community awareness as an extension of author awareness. She described it as a “methodological challenge faced by scholars whose focus is the communication of marginalized ethnic groups, particularly those who are members of the groups they study” (673) and explained that sometimes the sense of duty to one’s community in authorial intent is at odds with the sense of duty to the discipline and academic norms of writing and research. She lights a path through this dilemma with some navigational recommendations and illustrates them in her own work. The five elements of author-community awareness according to Houston are: “(1) research agendas are set by the

concerns of ordinary speakers; (2) analysis employs community-based theories; (3) the members of an ethnic group are conceived as heterogeneous; (4) privilege and power are problematized; (5) the discursive style of the work is as accessible as possible” (673). This author-community awareness also opens the door to a valuing of lived experience which produces what Pat Arneson described in her work as bringing to light “the comprehensiveness of experience that informs communicative engagement” (44). We see this engagement come forth in the other features of rhetorical intersectionality. In “Communicating as A Cross-cultural Ally” Houston tackles the need for solidarity among women working in academia. She is interrogating the state of communication among us and openly discussing possibilities for improvement. The political inner workings of departments, schools and divisions at our academic homes are issues that had normally been left out of our literature and scholarship or at least masked. Joining the tables of people taking closer looks at scholarship of teaching and learning in the field, some feminist scholars had begun to dismantle the notion that we could not discuss administrative university business in the public space of scholarship (Biesecker). However, there still seemed to be some disconnect in the ability to connect across cultural backgrounds for a universal uplifting of women in the field. Houston recognizes “three main culprits for the breakdown of alliance communication of women at some universities. Those three culprits were invisibility or silencing, underestimating (which is covered in the Presumed Incompetent text) and shifting criteria” (1).

Janice D. Hamlet, a mentee of Houston, “As women of color, when we talk about our experiences in academia—what has been said to us, done to us, kept from us—Dr. Houston has never been afraid to share her own experiences in helping us to know that we are not alone in these experiences. She does not hesitate to call these experiences by their names: racism, sexism,

or whatever other isms they might be” (“Giving”) She goes on to explain that women of color in academia can sometimes be made to feel as though their interpretations of experiences are imagined or colored in unreal ways by their backgrounds when the truth is that “their experiences in academia are real, not because we are too sensitive, or too defensive about our color or our gender, but because racism and sexism exist even among our colleagues” (“Giving”).

Hamlet’s representation is evident in Houston’s statement that “There are many idiosyncratic, personal and interpersonal factors that affect recruitment and retention of faculty of color that I cannot reflect in the strategies I suggest” (“Creating” 147). The strategies she refers to are ones for recruiting and retaining minority students and faculty. True to the exposure feature, she recommends honesty and forthrightness as a key component to any recruitment and retention strategy:

During the interview, alert the candidate of color to the unreceptive (or hostile) attitudes of some faculty members and give your honest assessment of how those faculty might affect the candidate as a member of your faculty. Tell the candidate what support he or she will receive within the department or institution to combat such faculty members (be sure to be honest about the types and level of support; if you expect faculty of color to deal with such persons on their own, say so.) Information about negative aspects of your departmental climate will not necessarily ‘turn the candidate off’ because people of color are used to achieving against the obstacles of racism. Candidates of color need this information in order to make an informed decision about your position. If they are hired, and discover such negative information later, they are likely to feel deceived and to immediately begin looking for another post (149).

Houston is also careful to warn of expectations that might be linear in nature and implying the possibility of absolute success. Instead of guarantee, what she offers is consideration for underused strategies. This feature of the intersection is its fluidity and understanding that goal posts move, while systems of oppression remain in place. Their functionalities shift and create a

need to be nimble. Though, it seems the fear of colleagues who will not be supportive of new faculty of color is just as present now as it was when she wrote the piece in 1994. Houston is clear that this is the case not only in the domain of race or ethnicity but also in that of sex or gender. Houston wrote in “Difficult Dialogues: Report on the 1990 Conference on Research in Gender and Communication” that “Scholarship that treats women as if the relative social power of the groups to which they belong does not influence their experience of womanhood will not be truly revisionist scholarship” (5). She highlights intersectionality as a major component of the discussion represented at the conference. Once again, she encourages an honest exposed look at how our scholarship comes forth positing that communication theorists, researchers, and teachers exercise considerable social power through the public discourse of our discipline. But we teach, create theory, and conduct research in the same racist (and sexist, and classist) social order experiences by all other communicators. In this context, communicators may produce race-, sex-, or class-biased text without even the dimmest recognition that they are doing so, that is, by doing what to them seems “normal” or “natural” (6).

Exposure as a feature of rhetorical intersectionality works to provide constant challenge to this, no matter how uncomfortable or difficult. Exposure is an act of love and humility for the virtue we uphold in pursuit of knowledge and understanding that is supposed to be sacred to academia. This fearless speech and fearless confrontation of issues and ideas is the balm that brings forth the healing that brings many of us to academia in the first place. Rhetorical intersectionality features exposure to serve as a reminder of that balm lest we render it powerless by being closeted and covered. Exposure also allows us to enter (Giddings) spaces of scholarship where we might otherwise be considered irrelevant. Exposure opens the path to space claiming and reclaiming that reveals itself as another hallmark of rhetorical intersectionality.

In her study “Multiple Perspectives: African American women conceive their talk”, Marsha Houston finds that a statement made by Geneva Smitherin in her ground-breaking work on African American language rang true. Smitherin contended that research on African American rhetoric often tended to place a great deal of emphasis on style but that the community of listeners in African American culture were not interested in only dynamism. They were interested in wisdom and substance as well. Houston brings Smitherman into her recognition of wisdom as a key characteristic:

Geneva Smitherman (1977) argues that communication scholars often place so much emphasis on the dynamic expressive style of Black speakers, they ignore the high value Blacks place on the substance of talk. Citing the criticism of dynamic but vacuous discourse in a once-popular soul song entitled, “Talkin Loud but Sayin Nothin,” Smitherman reminds us that through the ‘rich verbal interplay among everyday people, lessons and precepts about Black life and survival are handed down from generation to generation’ (73).

### Imagining the Future

In her essay “Beyond Survival on Campus: Envisioning Communication Studies at Women-Centered Universities” Houston is proposing a rhetorical intersectionality solution to the problem. She presents this document as a plan for a university that is both powerful and empowers intersectional representatives. When she addresses communication as a discipline, she is unafraid to center its study and weave it into mission that addresses students holistically stating that “the study of communication concepts and skills” will be present in in the academic core. The presence of communication as a mission critical element of this university necessitates that it pay strict attention to the need to endow students with not just information about “the politics of women’s past and present” but also the courage and ability to take on the mantle of being “articulate spokespersons for issues of human liberation in the future” (“Beyond Survival” 340). She realized that some would find her proposal “outrageous and distasteful” (342) while

others still would find it was not progressive enough. There she recognizes her position in the intersection. She also recognizes the importance of a futurism that engages the public sphere as we experience it in real time. In an article that examined the nomination of Lani Guinier to the position of Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights in 1993. She saw Guinier's facing of intense media scrutiny as a signal of a new area of research that would require pursuit:

As more African American women emerge as public political figures, credentialed, espousing alternative standpoints, they are bound to encounter long-standing class and gender-bound racial stereotypes. African American women pursuing or considering political careers may be empowered by language and communication scholarship that recovers, documents, and analyzes the counter-hegemonic discourse of those who previously have challenged misrepresentations of themselves. Yet there is no substantial tradition of such scholarship" (34).

This call for a new area of scholarship is an important display of intersectional futurism. In addition to consideration of future systems, Houston is known for her mentoring of students and junior faculty. Not having parents who worked in academia is a common struggle for African American women or other scholars from the intersection. Houston recognized this need and filled in the gaps as a mentor ("Giving II") Her mentee, Janice Hamlet sees this intersectional futurism in her commitment to mentoring as well. She described her mentoring method as providing vision and challenging the status quo: "A mentor helps protégés apprehend a different reality, helping them to visualize what they can accomplish and become. A mentor accomplishes this by being a role model, providing a "mirror" to extend others' self-awareness" ("Giving II"). For any number of reasons, using the margins as a site of resistance can be quite difficult. Operating within a space of radical openness makes us both more and less vulnerable. Giving voice to what and how we feel presents others with information that may be used to

legitimate efforts to problematize difference in the academy. Simultaneously, however, our radical openness frees us of experiencing the margins in isolation and empowers us to confront our dis/enchantment. By doing so, we also set the stage for dialogue to emerge across experiences (“Complexity” 412).

Dialogue as a healing is affirmed by Allen and extended by Atwater as a new way to theorize rhetoric itself. We tend to theorize rhetoric and dialogue separately, relegating dialogue to the area of interpersonal communication, but rhetorical intersectionality pulls them together noting rhetoric’s dependence on and connectedness to dialogue. As Foucault wrapped up his lectures on *parrhesia* in 1984, Deborah Atwater was penning a *parhhesiastic* article entitled “A Dilemma of Black Communication Scholars: The Challenge of Finding New Rhetorical Tools” In this article she points to the need for different tools with which to analyze Black rhetoric. She offers that “a suitable model for Afrocentric communication theory would be the *Nhiwatiwa* Wheel of Involved Communication, for there is no source or audience everyone is involved in except the complementary relating of experiences unified by Nommo (Blake, 1981; quoted in Simmons, 1982: 55). The *Nhiwatiwa* Wheel differs from the traditional models of communication, but it should if it is truly to represent the Black communication experience. Many of the articles on Black rhetoric do not always take an Afrocentric perspective and consequently generalizations are made by those who have viewed one small segment of the Black experience.” This statement takes on the status quo of academic writing on rhetoric and challenges it to the standard of humility invoked by Moraga and Arneson. A humility that accepts other world views may be appropriate lenses for examining rhetorical situations faced by minorities. Atwater is at once practicing and theorizing rhetorical intersectionality here. The

*Nhiwatiwa* wheel affirms the intersection and its ability to reinforce rhetoric that is as much about the orator as it is about the audience.

Rights of speech have been a concern for women of color in the United States since its inception. Phillis Wheatley wrote in a letter to then revolutionary George Washington encouraging him to “let every voice be heard.” The power shift exemplified in this exchange is dramatic. From a slave woman writing to the recently appointed general of the armies of North America in their quest for freedom from the Empire of Great Britain to the context of enslavement itself being maintained in the face of the willingness of Black Americans to die for the revolutionary cause, her letter to George Washington is the epitome of a rhetorical exercise from the American intersection that Crenshaw described. Wheatley is in structural, political and representational binds when it comes to her position in light of this exchange. And yet, she clearly and concisely offers this truth to power request to do what so few have paid attention to in rhetorical study: listen. The power to invoke listening is a uniquely intersectional one. Foucault noted that “The word ‘*parrhesia*’ then, refers to a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says. For in *parrhesia*, the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his own opinion. And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which would veil what he thinks” (3). In this sense *parrhesia* is one of the natural benefits of the intersection and rhetorical assets of marginalized. *Parrhesia* also emerges in communication scholarship as another way in which rhetorical intersectionality accomplishes uplift and the task of resisting oppression.



## Applications and Artifacts

### Marouf Hasian's Critical Analyses

Atwater's theoretical work on African American women's rhetoric and the nature of rhetorical intersectionality across periods of history also provides excellent ground for examination of cases like that found in Marouf Hasian's work on rhetorical intersectionalities in which he analyzes rhetorical history for varying perspectives on issues like race and gender. In his article "Critical Legal Theorizing, Rhetorical Intersectionalities, and the Multiple Transgressions of the "Tragic Mulatta," Anastasie Desarzent" we find a rhetorical analysis of a famous case in New Orleans. A woman is accused of passing for White and portrayed in a way that is consistent with the stereotypes of the tragic mulatta. This figure is of a woman whose sexual prowess and promiscuity are a danger to society and inherent in her nature. Hasian examines how these assertions were reified during her trial as truth based on testimony of neighbors, members of the community, telling their stories and beliefs based on the cultural logic in place. Hasian does not explicitly define the term "rhetorical intersectionalities" his titular vocabulary may refer to both the rhetorical intersectionalities as more of the representational intersectionality we find in Crenshaw's literature. He understands, however, that this was reinforced in language. For Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston, this power of language is exactly the antidote for the oppressive nature of intersectionality. I invite Hasian to join me in a reclamation of the term and a recognition in the names of Allen, Atwater, Houston, Crenshaw and so many other scholars and activists who have formed and strengthened the movement of solidarity from the intersection. A rhetorical intersectionality area of study would position Hasian to consider rhetorical intersectionality a curing, healing, bolstering, lifting as we are climbing, puts it: "The uses of these intersectionalist approaches invite critics to take into

account the multiple possibilities and constraints that exist in a host of historical and contemporary situations” (122).

Discourse on prison abolition in America is a series of spheres with an underlying vernacular on imprisonment in America as a vehicle for rendering certain members of the society voiceless and stripping freedom. Decarceration is seen by many as a continuation of the Civil Rights movements of the past and breaking silence surrounding it as a breaking of bondage that is as old as the nation (Alexander). This vernacular focuses on paradigms that have clearly identified socio-linguistic implications and dynamics in which communication forms social expectations. Examples of such paradigms would be criminality, jailing, victimhood, human trafficking and penitence. Linguistic and hermeneutic issues of larger paradigms such as racism and capitalism appear as skeletal structures on which the aforementioned ones are dependent. This means the writing and speech can be quite varied and expansive in nature. For this project, I have turned to prison abolition discourse that focuses on the incarceration systems of America. With each of the cases of abolitionist voices here, we find a language and meaning being challenged so that a vernacular of freedom may be reintroduced to the public sphere(s). There are many works that would provide an exciting view of language and meaning relationships that exist among formations of “state” and the public sphere in the discourse on the prisons. Habermas, for instance, provides clear notions of the formation of a bourgeoisie that excludes and relegates criminality as a separated public sphere and re-imagines what crime or violence even is depending on cultural constraints the rhetorical relationships within prison abolitionism become extremely clear when looked at through the lens of rhetorical intersectionality.

## Reclaiming Rhetorical Intersectionality with *Parrhesia*

Theories of *parrhesia* are commonly linked to Michel Foucault's famous lectures on the term. Notions of speaking truth in the face of danger appear in many communication texts. To focus this study, I specifically chose to highlight works by women addressing issues of marginalization in the United States. These have included Anna Julia Cooper, Pat Arneson, Gloria Anzaldua, and Cherrie Moraga. Each of them expressed the importance of practicing *parrhesia* in recognition of human connection – the idea that what happens to one person has an impact on the humanity of the rest of us. This idea is expanded in a prominent South African philosophical metaphor called *ubuntu* meaning I am because we are. I found *ubuntu* to be a common thread in the works of Allen, Atwater, and Houston focused on reclaiming intersectionality to uplift people rather than oppress them. Another common thread was the willingness of each of these scholars to be very open about their experiences in the academy and speak truth about the intersectionality they have encountered at work. They use the fearless speech about this to call for change in the field and reclaim space as scholars making them both theorists and practitioners of reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality.

I experienced this dichotomy firsthand in an undergraduate course taught by Dr. Priscilla Murolo at Sarah Lawrence College in the early 1990s. Dr. Murolo had a reputation for making students think. As we approached the different texts in her course entitled “Modern American Women's Movements”. We came to a week when we were reading about Fannie Lou Hamer and I was fascinated. The other women, all White as I can recall, seemed to be fascinated as well. We had great discussions about her activism and her bravery. We emphasized her important role in sparking a national conversation about intersections of race and poverty. We admired her rhetorical genius and how she so plainly but eloquently broke it down when she quipped “I'm

sick and tired of being sick and tired?” and we wondered why history had not held her in a brighter spotlight alongside say Martin Luther King, Jr. or Booker T. Washington. I quickly assumed that her gender had something to do with the quiet surrounding her name.

Unfortunately, there was an element lurking that I had not considered, and it reared its head in that classroom. “Is Fannie Lou Hamer part of a women’s movement?” Dr. Murolo asked the class. I sat there, somewhat dumbfounded by her question. I knew her style well enough to know that she was bringing about a discussion she had deemed necessary. She was baiting us. I nodded my head at her and watched her face light up as her eyes lifted in an insider smile and she carefully moved them from me to the rest of the small den of a classroom. I followed her gaze around at the other White faces staring blankly at her perhaps in realization that this discussion was not going to go the way we had thought it would. One of them, a graduate student who I had come to admire a great deal and looked up to because of her dedication and studiousness, finally broke the silence and said “well, no, not really”. I was confused. As the rest of the women came into agreement with her, I felt embarrassed. I felt like I was a 4th grader who had been asked if two times two was five and with no hesitation answered YES. I felt like all eyes were on me – not for an explanation – but in pity that I had somehow gotten something so simple so wrong. As I began to sink into what felt like an ocean of shame in that moment, Dr. Murolo threw out a lifesaver with her next question. A question that lifted me back up out of that wave, smacked my chest clear and stood me squarely on my feet. “Why not?” No one wasted time beating around the bush. Because she was a champion of racial justice and economic equality, she was not specifically part of a women’s movement. This opened my eyes to a critical dimension of my Blackness that I had not really thought much about before. In the spaces I had entered, woman inherently meant White. Any other kind of womanhood and any other kind of activism

surrounding a non-White womanhood had to be qualified. I felt as if my womanhood was somehow not pure enough – somehow too muddled with other issues. In that room, I felt that I had been adopted into feminism rather than born with the right to ascribe to it. I felt that my being a Black woman would always mean I had to signal when I was talking about womanhood and when I was talking about something else. I did not have much in my intellectual arsenal then to respond to any of this, but I did have my emotions. So, I responded with them. I said I found it hurtful that she would be dismissed because of her race and socio-economic status. I mean, at the heart of it that is what was being said. To ask that she only be considered part of a women's movement if she had not placed so much emphasis on the issues that directly affected her was to say that those issues themselves erased her womanhood. I said that a movement was a group of people coming together to enact change in society where the status quo has perpetuated injustices. A women's movement was then any movement where those perpetuated injustices touched the lives of women or women were at the forefront of trying to bring about change. Fannie Lou Hamer was part of a women's movement because she was a woman and worked alongside other women to change the patriarchal racist classist system that had subjugated so many people for so long. I do not remember convincing anyone. But I do remember that I got sick and tired of being sick and tired of that discussion and just consented to move on. We discussed a few more things that day and I went on with the rest of the day feeling uneasy but surer of myself than in that initial moment. I had a new sense of myself as the Black woman in the room and felt a responsibility to honor that.

The courage to speak truth to power and speak with the conviction of fullness and direction of *parrhesia* is critical to the phase of rhetorical intersectionality that encompasses speech after silence-breaking. Allen, Atwater and Houston's rhetorical intersectionality iterations

join a communication theory set in motion by Gadamer and Ricoeur's notions that historicity is reinforced in our cultural narratives. This means that even the dialogue of prison abolition would prove itself steeped in a historical narrative that must be recognized. That narrative has its own intersectional implications as profound as the ones that emerge from the discourse itself. That narrative for Davis and many members of CR is slavery. For Griffith, it is also slavery but not just a physical and psychological form of it. Griffith is also concerned with spiritual enslavement.

The link Davis and Griffith make from slavery to imprisonment in the United States is one that requires a kairotic lens. Enslavement provided an economic stronghold in many states. Not having a replacement for that system left the southern economy on its knees. As America grappled with its status as a new nation, the intersections of politics, industry and social movement produced an opportunistic moment. The discourse of the time ruptured open a set of public spheres that allowed Jim Crow laws and a national code that reinforced the racism intertwined with the system of slavery. With slavery outlawed under the 13th amendment except in cases where a person had committed a crime, a new set of systems arose. Douglas Blackmon explores convict leasing as one such system in his work, *Slavery by Another Name*. Under convict leasing systems, state correctional institutions - jails, prisons, workhouses, etc. could legally lease their inmates to business owners in need of hard labor. But where would they get all of these criminals? The same place where they had always gotten free labor. Criminal was simply a new term for Black. And to reinforce this the laws and codes needed were developed to target this synonym. To be Black was in and of itself the ultimate crime. This was an ontological crime that merely needed a language and meaning structure for support. Violations included being "uppity" vagrancy, and unemployment (Blackmon 56). Highly subjective and easily

manipulated, these codes were designed to fit Black people. A White person born with the inalienable right of Manifest Destiny could not possibly be accused of being "uppity". 98% of the people arrested for vagrancy were Black men. Unemployment was a direct effect of the abolition of enslavement. To criminalize this was merely to reverse the order of logic. Rather than accept slavery as being illegal, we now had a system of laws that made it illegal to be free. Convict leasing existed until 1948.

The Kligman retinol experiments at the Holmesburg Prison from 1952 to 1974 are an extension of the convict leasing system and in fact follow a pattern of shifts in human trafficking. The Western economic paradigm shifted from being one based on specialty and use value of goods or services to being one of consumerism and exchange value of goods or services. Despite that change, we still find that people are bought and sold. The purchases had been made for use value - how much labor could be extracted from the person. As WWII confirmed industrialism and the rise of global capitalist agendas, the buying and selling of people still included their use but began to see a dramatic shift toward exchange value - how much cash or capital could be stocked from the person. One way in which this is apparent is in the use of prisoners for pharmaceutical and chemical experiments. We must consider the possibility that this methodology of using flesh for capital business purposes was even fortified by the continuing Holocaust America waged on its own lower caste. In the Holmesburg case, Dr. Kligman used the prisoners to conduct trials for a skin drug. He saw the prison inmates as fertile ground referring to them as "acres of skin". These systems demonstrate that American society had accepted prisons as natural parts of our social and economic landscape. The narratives have persistently discouraged discourse on alternatives and protected prisons as an embodiment of cultural norms like human trafficking,

racism and sexism. The abolitionists of today are careful to call upon those persistent norms because they are one of the ways in which a new public sphere of discussion is formed.

These norms are upheld in recalcitrance even among the very victims of these old racist and sexist ideologies who have been subjects of a discourse that would redefine their victimhood in a language that identifies criminality internally and seeks to eliminate the visibility of broader context or historical narrative.

Inclusion in this dialogue is a sincere paradox in that the very core of this public sphere, prisoners themselves, are many times not entitled to speech either by moral devaluing of their speech acts or by actual restraint. This can occur both external of the discourse and internally at intercultural crossroads. Angela Davis acknowledges multicultural dimensions in *Are Prisons Obsolete?* with her inquiry about the relationship between historical expressions of racism and the role of the prison system today. She reminded readers that there are other racialized histories that have affected the development of the American punishment system as well. While in some activism circles, this becomes a point of diversion and divisiveness, Davis specifically mentions the histories of Latinx, Native Americans, and Asian Americans and states that these racisms, like anti-Black racism, also congeal and combine in the prison (*Are Prisons Obsolete?* 35). Davis is also takes on a rhetorical intersectionality stance in examining the prevailing feminist track of the discourse noting the need for unity here too as she noted that advocating for gender equality when it comes to imprisonment should naturally coalesce with advocating for justice for everyone imprisoned. Here she engages Tekla Miller's challenges to the Michigan correctional differences in male and female prison standards. She argues that the case for gender equality among prisoners is flawed noting that "a more productive version of feminism would question the organization of state punishment for men and that the institution as a whole-gendered as it is-



calls for the kind of critique that might lead us to consider its abolition (Are Prisons Obsolete? 75).

The challenge to imprisonment in the United States and its course along the lines of enslavement is an example of the silence breaking rhetorical intersectionality features at work. Davis, Griffith and CR writers remember the roots of imprisonment, conceive a future without mass incarceration and break the stigmatized silence of being a prisoner. Their approach demonstrates the power of rhetorical intersectionality to unify and uplift in activism asserting that inclusion is a necessary stance for true freedom. They do this with their methods of discourse including text in many languages and forms (like Zheng's poem which includes some Spanish) and then at their assessments of linguistic paradigms. This silence breaking component of rhetorical intersectionality has deep communication ethics implications because it asks the public to reconfigure and in some instances co-construct the language we use to engage in dialogue and discourse. In the concluding article of Abolition Now! Raedeen Keahiolalo-Karasuda ends her discussion on a prison abolition movement in Hawaii with this statement that sums up the link between the rhetorical intersectionality features I discussed in the earlier part of the chapter and the activism here:

We live under a regime of deliberate silence regarding the standardized containment and punishment of entire groups of people...Going forward, our goals must be to increase political literacy and create ways of hearing, understanding and responding to the voices and experiences of those most intimately familiar with the prison industrial complex (132).

The theoretical lens of Allen, Atwater and Houston's work seems to point to this as the silence breaking of rhetorical intersectionality and its power to heal.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### LISTENING AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Like silence and *parrhesia*, listening is a vital metaphor of communication study. Listening is the act of being in attendance to the experiences of someone else (Lipari). Listening is distinctively communicative as it has the power to deepen our relationships among one another and enrich our interactions. But it is often provided less coverage in communication research (Olson). Listening is the central metaphor of this chapter. In addition to Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston, there are some key scholars who inform the issues and ideas of listening. Lisbeth Lipari, Krista Ratcliffe, Jack Daniel, and Geneva Smitherman join the others to enrich understandings of listening as a communication metaphor and its relationship to intersectionality. In this chapter I will identify some theories of listening that have relationships to intersectionality. First I will examine the call and response listening theory. Next, I will look at rhetorical listening as a framework that connects listening and intersectionality. The third listening theory included here will be ethics of attunement which introduces a philosophy of communication backdrop to the discussion. After I discuss some theories of listening, I will look at the contributions of Allen, Atwater and Houston to listening as a component of intersectionality issues and responses to them. Their contributions highlight how listening and intersectionality open scholarship in the realms of rhetoric, along with interpersonal and organizational communication. Finally, I will examine how the work of Allen, Atwater and Houston has also provided space for an intersectional communication approach in applied communication research and research that addresses the legacy of intersectionality oppressions and social problems that we have visited in previous chapters.

## Key Terms and Scholars

**Attunement.** Rhetorical intersectionality pulls together listening and commitment to the lived experiences of marginalized people. Rhetorical intersectionality engages social scientific approaches as well, but does not privilege those approaches over analysis of lived experience and phenomenological accounting. As Lipari unpacks the idea of an ethics of attunement, she points to resonance or the depth of sound as a metaphor in rhetorical thought that listens for silences, and deep nearly secret sounds alongside the louder pitches and, in rhetorical public spheres, voices. Lipari then pairs this with the ancient rhetorical idea of *kairos* or right timing for a stance on listening that is dynamic rather than technical and like the listening uncovered by Krista Ratcliffe, rhetorical. We see this at work in the scholarship of Allen, Atwater, Crenshaw and Houston as they define voices that are too often lost from resonance or ignored. They recover these voices and remind us that the time to hear them is now.

**Akroasis.** This is an ancient Greek term for oral discourse. Whereas a thesis is characterized by theoretical work and written thoughts, *akroasis* is characterized by listening work and hearing what is spoken in a forum. As Lisbeth Lipari offers, *akroasis* can also be a listening to written work but it focuses the act of listening rather than the act of theorizing (as in a thesis) or interpreting (as in exegesis).

**Kairos.** *Kairos* is also an ancient Greek term. *Kairos* is a Greek term. It has no agreed upon translation but has many that point us in the same direction. And as Maier indicates in his study of *Kairos* and the Rhetoric of The Catholic Church, “The rhetorical tradition has recognized the importance of *kairos*, though different rhetorical thinkers have recognized different dimensions” (Maier 55). Usually, we recognize *kairos* by its foil construct of *chronos*. As Sipiora notes in his defining *kairos*, “Hesiod is probably the source of the maxim, “Observe due measure, and

proportion [*kairos*] is best in all things”. In time, *kairos* began to be distinguished from *chronos*, or linear time (Sipiora and Baumlin 2). James Baumlin notes in his explication of *kairos* in Renaissance rhetoric and art that “ the linearity of *chronos* time appears in the iconographic symbolism of flight or of marching single-file, in contrast, the circled serpent makes visual reference to the seasonality and circularity of aion-time....In asserting the uniqueness of each moment rather than the constant linear passage of time (again, *chronos*) or the fulfillment of time (that is, aion) *kairos* marks that single, fleeting moment when an individual chooses from among all competing alternatives and eventualities, thereby changing one’s world-as-lived” (Sipiora and Baumlin 155).

In this project, *kairos* is often found to refer to proper timing. It is generally tied to situations of change in how something is perceived and its social or political acceptability and/or urgency.

Lisbeth Lipari joins *kairos* to *akroasis* in her description of listening that she calls attuned.

***I-It and I-Thou.*** I-It and I-Thou relationships are two different manners of communicating with fellow human beings that either tend only to one portion or iteration of a person’s existence (I-It) and thereby demeaning their humanity reducing the other to an object or allowing a person’s whole self to be considered in communication with an other (I-Thou). In *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age*, Pat Arneson and Ronald Arnett Martin Buber’s distinction between these two communication relationship models stating, “In the terror of collapse of constructive metanarratives, Buber called for courage to attend to the other and respond with one’s whole being, permitting the reality of the between to be visible and heard in the discourse” (139).

***Hearing and Listening.*** Lipari defined listening as distinct from hearing and longitudinal rather than incidental. She wrote “Thus we might say that in dialogic ethics, listening is my vocation, my calling. And this vocation of listening requires an encounter with the unknown; listening

draws forth something hidden, bringing something new into the world” (“Rhetoric’s Other” 238). Listening is done with attentiveness and care. Listening is making the move from seeing the other as a Buberian “it” to “thou”; this transition requires constant tending. Listening is therefore, not a static act but rather one we come back to when it devolves into hearing. Hearing is just being in the same space as a voice or sound. Hearing does not imply an attentiveness nor does it imply an attempt to understand.

***Transcendence.*** Transcendence also allows for multiple narratives that defy the assumed laws of identity physics which do not account for several opinions, ideas or stances to occupy the same place at the same time. Rhetorical intersectionality is, in this way, transcendental. The theoretical lens of Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston’s work seems to point to this as the silence breaking of rhetorical intersectionality and its power to heal. Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston have generated a synergy of work in intersectionality and communication by bringing together communication theories and the Crenshaw framework. Their theoretical work, along with other scholars who have so richly packed the rhetorical intersectionality soil, allows for the ground to propose it as a new area of specialty in which examination and cultivation of other works can happen more intentionally.

### Some Theories of Listening

#### Call and Response

Jack Daniel and Geneva Smitherman define the communication in the Black communities of the United States as having surface and deep structures. They differentiate these two stating that they have “unique but complementary natures. Surface structures are objective, empirical, subject to relatively rapid change, constrained by time and space, and non-generative in nature. Deep structures are intangible, subjective, archetypal, not culturally bound, and generative in nature”

(26). They note that quite a bit of the characteristics have roots in the Black church and its communication standards. Interestingly, the church is a site of intersectionality that makes room. I recall a time when a group of Black church members read the scripture about letting the women learn in silence. This was promptly challenged and recognized as something that was not useful to the members of the church I was attending. I would venture to say that this attitude has consensus across Black churches where women learn in listening which is not the same as silence and learn in teaching which is by far one of the best documented pedagogies there is. These are things Daniel and Smitherman explicitly deem central to Black communication and differentiated from forms where speaking is privileged over listening. “As a basic communication tactic, call-response seeks to synthesize ‘speakers’ and ‘listeners’ in a unified movement” (33). “Shot through with action and interaction, Black communicative performance is concentric in quality - the ‘audience’ becoming both observers and participants in the speech event” (39).

The call and response dynamic is one that invites the rhetor to the act of listening and to honor the listeners. In the United States this has been steeped in survival for African Americans. We have learned that survival is dependent upon the kind of listening that is nimble, active and woven into speech acts. This is exhibited in songs that are called Negro spirituals. These spirituals cloaked messages that warned slaves trying to escape of dangers or opportunities. A singer would issue the call line such as “Wade in the water” and others would respond with echo lines that repeated it creating a strong reverberation for anyone trying to escape who might be in need of directions. This is also exhibited in the song “Got My Letter?”: Leader: Got my letter? All: O yeah! Huh! Leader: Got my letter? All: O yeah! Huh! Leader: Got my letter? All: O yeah! Huh! People keep a-comin’ and the train done gone” (Pekar and Whittaker). This song was

used to communicate messages about freedom and wait times for the possibility of escape or movement North. This continued through the emancipation period and into the 20th century. Communications scholars Melbourne Cummings and Abhik Roy examined this in a study devoted to recognition of African principles of communication in rap music. They explain that “one of the most enduring and recognizable characteristics of nommo is call and response.” Nommo refers to the Dogon deity or set of deities that represent primacy. They are sometimes narrated as actual beings and sometimes narrated as original ideas or thoughts. Stories of them are as complex as gods from other planets or as simple as an origin point for the duality we construct as good and evil. The fundamental notion is that nommos are fundamental and a salient component of their mode of communication with humanity is that of call and response. This is also found in Akan culture where a speaker asks permission of the audience before beginning to talk. This is done with a call and response tradition in which the orator calls “Ago?” and the audience responds “Ame!” In this tradition the speaker is asking the audience to listen, and the audience responds “we are listening” as the speaker begins. This call and response is an acknowledgment that listening and speaking are connected, not two separate arenas of communication but interdependent and intertwined making communication together. In this way, Cummings and Roy trace the listening theory of call and response from African roots to practices of rappers in the 20th and 21st centuries. They explain that the key to this listening theory is to understand the aversion to the notion of the communicator as having a solitary voice. The call and response listening framework can range in its complexity of spoken language but the underlying system of listening is extremely complex with a sophisticated “synergy” present between the communicating parties. Cummings and Roy explain: “Religious events are replete with call-response interactions, but so are secular events, including rap music. Oftentimes rap

music functions as a conversation drama in which the rappers invite the listeners to participate in the dynamic process” (69). The dynamism of call and response is embedded in its fast-acting style. Call and response is a rescue procedure born of necessity and times of strife or struggle like the Nommos’ struggle to give fire to humans for survival and the enslaved Africans’ struggles to make it past dogs, whips, shots, and miles of land to freedom. Call and response is invoked in some rap music as both a reminder that life in the United States as an African American is still fraught with strife and requires the ability to deploy fast-acting remedies that provide a way forward. Hip hop and other cultural icons of African American life also have artifacts that are not fast-acting but rather built on systemic slow flowing listening: rhetorical listening.

### Rhetorical Listening

Krista Ratcliffe described rhetorical listening as a construct of listening that assumes the coming of an opening through communication rather than a closing. Ratcliffe’s proposal of rhetorical listening is very different from many approaches to listening that are derived from a philosophical stance of critique. Critique is an exercise of modernity that is traceable through European thought processes and communication processes back to antiquity. She described the Western rhetorical tradition as having developed an ignorance of listening and lack of attention to it. I am suggesting that Western traditions may have actively sought to position listening in a way that reified constructs of power.

Cicero’s signature argument method resting on stasis theory poses an implication of listening specifically for the point of disagreement. Machiavelli’s extension of that into late antiquity and the early middle ages positions listening for dissent and stamping it out as a necessary function of leadership and maintenance of power. As the middle ages moved forward, the role of listening



in any meaningful way is shifted to the powerless and the expectation is that common people will listen to be able to meet the expectations placed upon them by the powerful and ruling members of society (Murphy). As we observed in the call and response theory, this is highlighted by religious doctrine. In Christianity, that can be found in interpretations of Paul's caution to the church at Corinth to have women learn in silence which effectively placed women in a position of listening for instruction without questioning or the presumption of public teaching at least in the area of faith and practice thereof. This has been challenged in many areas of Christian religious expression, including many Black churches in the Americas. However, its reach was not without some avail and there are still churches where the position of women as it is constructed in listening theory is below that of men. Jewish and Muslim scholars and jurists experienced similar issues affecting the interpretations of the roles of women in listening constructs in those religious contexts. As these were the dominant faiths of the European societies and ones connected to it, these issues became fixtures of listening and how we consider it in relationship to social status including gender as well as other status constraints or delinations. Listening became associated with receipt of instruction, commands and remaining in order. The Enlightenment period saw a demand for privileging ideas of reason or science in the face of medical and economic challenges. Medical and economic challenges like the spread of the Bubonic plague forced the ideas of innovation, labor and evidence-based practices to the forefront of social and philosophical thought. While religious leadership may have done battle in the fight for the spotlight that ensued, there is nothing to suggest that the vestiges of religious systems did not permeate this dawn of Europe's age of reason bringing with it a manner of conceiving listeners as those without knowledge and speakers as those who are experts. If anything, the period that preceded the Industrial Revolution may have widened the gulfs

between listener and speaker. When feudalism and enslavement bled into capitalism and individualism, it left the stain of listener to speaker stratification on the new systems. Thorstein Veblen and Kenneth Burke both point to an ensuing trained incapacity that promoted a narrow focus in learning and listening. They noted that this narrow focus was protecting blindness to varying perspectives and ways of approaching thinking. Cecil Blake also noted this narrow vision in approaches to applied communication study: “It seems incumbent on all interested in the diverse process of human communication to extend the venues of our interests and incorporate in our research areas that serve today as laboratories for understanding communication and human development” (202). He encouraged a new commitment to philosophy of communication that was open to inconsistencies between ways of understanding communication that dominate the interpretation of rhetorical artifacts (204). Blake asks a pivotal rhetorical listening question that was meant specifically for scholars of rhetoric “Are we engaged in the "legislation" of ideologies as a basis for scholarly investigation instead of trying to understand the workings of the communication process, regardless of ideologies?” (204). Krista Ratcliffe points to this phenomenon as a listening discourages opening of the mind and calls instead for rhetorical listening both in our work as communication scholars and in the broader social spheres.

Ratcliffe’s proposal of a rhetorical listening builds on Veblen, Burke and Blake’s recognitions of trained incapacity or willful ignorance. She asks communicators to instead break the chain of cultural logic that comes from a closed minded way of listening. She explained that listening to critique or narrow focus produces a “cultural script” and that cultural script gives rise to series of actions we then undertake. Rhetorical listening is a disruption of the production of this script and thus the actions that come from it. Ratcliffe recognizes the contemporary social positioning of

listening with an introduction to Nikki Giovanni's work intersectional understandings of listening. Ratcliffe noted Giovanni's articulation of listening as being a necessary survival tool for women, people of color and poor people. She also retells Giovanni's explanation of this through the film "Imitation of Life" in which a White woman says to her lifelong worker who is Black that she did not know she "belonged to a lodge" to which the Black woman replies "well you never asked". Ratcliffe indicates that this story and other cultural artifacts that appear in Giovanni's assessment are deficits in listening and biases against it. Again, I would add that this bias, whether it is unconscious or conscious, is baked into the way we approach communication to create listening as a space for those without privilege. Ratcliffe, in her invocation of Nikki Giovanni, poses this as having intersectional roots. She introduces rhetorical listening as a "trope for interpretive invention" by completing four rhetorical listening moves. The moves are "1-promoting an understanding of self and other, 2-proceeding with an accountability logic, 3-locating identifications across similarities and differences, and 4-analyzing claims as well as the cultural logics within which these claims function" (26). Ratcliffe is open about the flaws of rhetorical listening and rejects a notion that the four moves need to be linear instead leaving room for further interpretation and issuing an invitation for adaptation. This non-linear approach can be found in the work of Allen, Atwater and Houston that engages the intersectional perspective Ratcliffe recognizes in Giovanni's voice. Before we approach their scholarship, I would like to introduce Lipari's Ethics of Attunement as a final theory of listening to bring to this study.

### Ethics of Attunement

An ethics of attunement theory presents us with the notion that listening has accompaniment and a harmony in which it is best located. This theory is developed by Lisbeth Lipari in her book

*Listening, Thinking, Being* and in earlier works as well. Lipari's book takes a multi-faceted and de-centrist look at listening. While she does not assume the cultural context that brought about intersectionality. Much of what she described is readily visible and audible in the intersectionality setting we have discussed where race, gender and class play such critical roles. In some theoretical constructs hearing is in fact a step toward justice. A willingness to acknowledge that there even are other voices in the same space is beyond a default of muteness and invisibility of certain voices and people. Acknowledgment is both rhetorical and interpersonal at the same time. Acknowledgment attends to the other and uses that act as an act of resistance.

In *Listening, Thinking, Being*, Lipari posits misunderstanding as an inevitability and repositions speaking as de-centralized within communication. Lipari states that the book grounds "the human experience of being as an ethical relation with others that is enacted by means of listening" (7). Lisbeth Lipari offers a theory of listening in an ethics of attunement as a connection of listening as participation in a discourse and temporality as right timing or opportunity. These two ideas are represented in her text as *akroasis* and *kairos* (214). Lipari's theory of listening as an ethics of attunement is grounded in the relationship between these two ideas as symbiotic. She infuses various outgrowths and processes with which both *kairos* and *akroasis* are concerned into an elixir that only works when both are present. Her culminating thoughts are that not only are the two necessarily intertwined and dependent on one another, but that the robust rendering of an audience or a timing for listening that these notions produce are more than a theory of communication in the mechanical sense but also a theory of listening as an ethical stance. A friend and colleague from another country once asked me offer my impressions of a story she was planning to perform for a local contest in Pittsburgh. I eagerly agreed and

asked if she would perform it for me or have me read it. She replied that she would want me to read it and then explained more about the event. I followed by asking her if I could attend the event. I had heard her discuss previous storytelling events and knew that she tended to raise important concerns in highly moving language that I would like to experience live in community with her and other attendees. I explained to her that I would also like to talk to her about taking action on any issues that come up and call us to do so. In this way I am invited to the discourse both in written and spoken form. I offer myself to the event or temporal moment of delivery and I am open to the prospect of that moment springing forth a more meaningful and important connection between the *akroasis* and *kairos* of this situation. I hope that in this intersection of two minority women in academia from backgrounds that presented many socio-economic challenges, we help one another overcome and feel empowered by this attempt at practicing an ethics of attunement. I am grateful to Lipari for this idea and see its value in other intersectionality settings.

Listening and Intersectionality: Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston

The work that Allen, Atwater and Houston have done on listening is connected to the composite of theoretical approaches above with specific attention to intersectionality and how listening can be a force of uplift in intersectional situations. In this section, we will take a look at some key listening movements articulated in their works to present a theory of listening and intersectionality. These listening theories often provide a bridge between interpersonal communication, intercultural communication and rhetoric. There are many instances where these bridging listening theories of call and response, rhetorical listening and ethics of attunement, can be found in cases of resistance to oppressive intersectionality. In the next section, I will explore some history of this as it relates specifically to enslavement in the United States (an origin point

for intersectionality) and highlight the features of listening that reverse the flow of oppression and turn the intersection into a force for freedom.

### Examining Listening and Intersectionality

While Crenshaw is indeed an academic, she is also deeply entrenched in community work that addresses policy needs in local and global contexts. Brenda Allen has moved in this way by building the next steps of her higher education career firmly in the camp of commitment to diversity and inclusion. Marsha Houston has done this with her incredible commitment to mentoring and opening space for new scholars to find their own voices once again, inviting people into the intersection and pushing back against oppressive forces. I think this is evident in poll analysis after elections in the past two years. People seemed so surprised to find that White women were a large force in the Trump voter block; as though people had assumed that womanhood was to be represented by Clinton and that women across identity nexi would vote the same way. The subsequent election of Doug Jones was identified as a victory set by Black women. This was a first for me, hearing the role of the Black women voters in the outcome of an election. The Jones victory also regvanized movements of women to form coalitions around their intersections and resist a monolithic narrative of voting interests. Academia and academic study is also a structure and must be interrogated to be sure it is not employing the same interlocking domination upon intersectionality that the field is trying to resist. Reclaiming and remembering Crenshaw's role in intersectionality may also increase access to the term and its literature. Varderman-Winter et al note that "intersectionality is not a common word. Some participants may feel confused by interviewers asking about their intersecting identities, and some may feel vulnerable talking about how their identities create opportunities or hardships for them" (290) They recognize philosophy scholar Elizabeth Spelman as a co-constructor of

intersectionality theorizing noting her work on inessentializing the notions of womanhood and recognizing nuance. They also acknowledge the work of Patricia Hill Collins connecting intersectionality to her theory of a matrix of domination and the idea that “social inequality does not result from a simple addition of gender, class, race, sexual orientation and many other social identities. Rather macro-level structures such as the law, educational and economic systems, and politics create an ‘interlocking matrix of relationships’ (285).

Hashtag movements have become a powerful rhetorical force creating a huge range of ground to cover in rhetorical intersectionality. Some of the ones that would prove fruitful in the rhetorical intersectionality area of study include the #MeToo, #GrabYourWallet, #MuteRKelly movements to end complicity in rape culture and the acceptance of everyday sexism especially in communities where women’s disadvantages are multiplied. The #BlackGirlMagic, #CiteBlackWomen along with the plethora of natural hair and body positivity hashtags serve to reaffirm the intellectual value and beauty of women of color. These movements have united woman across a wide range of backgrounds and realized Audre Lorde’s call to “transform silence into language into action” (1)

Anna Deveare Smith’s *Notes from the Field*

Anna Deveare Smith is an actress and writer from Baltimore, Maryland. She grew up in the time of desegregation and has remained committed to an examination of the desegregation of schools. Her work connects the abolitionist movement discussed earlier to current events. Her play, *Notes from the Field* opened in 2016 as the most recent presidential election was ending. It was put on in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and off-Broadway at Second Stage Theater in New York. Smith’s signature style is the one-woman show wherein she uses her position in as a member of the intersection to portray dramatized versions of interviews she has conducted. In *Notes from*

the Field, she plays “students, parents, teachers and administrators affected by America’s school-to-prison pipeline, which pushes underprivileged, minority youth out of the classroom and into incarceration” (Smith). In the play, now available as a film, Smith portrays both famous people like journalist Charlayne Hunter Gault and Congressman John Lewis, but also “everyday people struggling in a broken system” (Smith). She described this as the “centerpiece” of her initiative, The Pipeline Project, which began in 2013 and seeks to extend the conversation of pressing issues beyond theater and into America’s communities. Smith’s work is rhetorical intersectionality. Smith combines journalism and theater to bring the stories of people from all walks of American life together in this and her other one woman shows about life in the United States since slavery and the genocidal theft of land that allows us to walk here. Atwater’s theoretical work on rhetorical history and history of rhetoric from the intersectional standpoint would be great theoretical ground to explore the work of Anna Deveare Smith as would Allen’s quest to open organizational communication to examine organizations with a narrative eye and Houston’s call for a future in communication study where margins are unbound.

### Reclaiming Rhetorical Intersectionality by Listening

The theories of listening explored from the intersection come from unique experiences and cultural history of people of color, womanists, and feminists. These include signifying as well as call and response as forms of active listening that stress the importance of both audience and speaker in discourse. For reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality, rhetorical listening and attunement are factors that play a vital role in recognizing opportunities for uplift. Allen, Atwater and Houston highlight the union and syncopation of listening and intersectionality. Their works demonstrate that not only is listening integral to reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality but that viewing communication itself holistically is a construct that requires a view from the



intersection. This kind of intersectionality enacts listening by pointing to transcendence and committing to the importance of lived experience. Listening by intersectionality engages social scientific approaches as well but does not privilege those approaches over analysis of lived experience and phenomenological accounting. Listening from the intersection, by intersectionality and with intersectionality is collective, constructive and a hermeneutic approach that expands rather than contracting.

Brenda Allen describes working with her colleagues Mark Orbe and Margarita Refugia Olivas in a reflexive writing team as an act of listening that is attuned in the sense that Lipari defines that term. They describe their aims in producing “The Complexity of Our Tears: Disenchantment and (1n)Difference In the Academy”:

We believe that work in our discipline can help members of society understand issues related to difference and to learn how to interact positively and ethically with one another. We feel certain that we can accomplish these goals as educators and learners, as we interact with one another within and across our departments, institutions and professional associations, as we conduct and publish our research, and as we develop and implement undergraduate curricula. However, before we can transform the academy along those lines, we believe that we must engage in frank, open discussions about our experiences, as well as how we feel, what we think, what we fear, what we dream. As we conceived and developed this project, the three of us did exactly that, with healing and transformative consequences for ourselves. As you read this article, we hope that ‘listening to’ our experiences provides a discursive space where you can engage in self-reflexivity in terms of your own dis/enchantment within the academy (408).

Houston has built a body of scholarship that breaks boundaries, questions and challenges both to push past intersections and take important looks at how they are constructed. This property of transcendence is a gift and invitation to scholars. Transcendence opens the field and expands our research. Houston has also remained committed to lived experience as a premier component of that research thereby assuring that rhetorical intersectionality is an instrument of uplift through a reverence for life and human dignity. Rhetorical intersectionality does not ignore data or the majesty of empirical research, but it is historically aware of the dangers that come with divorcing human narratives from these data. Rhetorical intersectionality also recognizes the need for research whose audience is broader than a committee of readers or editors. As Houston stated: An interesting transcendence and commitment to lived experience perspective is also captured in her report from the 1990 conference when she wrote that “Many of the conferees expressed discomfort with definitions of differences among women that use labels...that appear to create oppositions between groups of women (e.g., "White women"; "women of color"); that obscure the heterogeneity within a group (e.g., "Women of color"; "Asian-American women"); or that capture only a part of the identity of the members of a group” (3). Houston proposes research labeling methods be looked at from the standpoint of lived experiences rather than coding for academia, once again centering the women’s lives. Her commitment to this transcendence and lived experience is confirmed by Kathleen Turner who said “Sister Marsha tells us, ‘Acknowledge but don’t totalize differences. Don’t impose your standards on other social groups.’ (“Giving”).

John W. Lannamann’s landmark article “Interpersonal Communication Research as Ideological Practice” added complexity to defining and assumptions underlying interpersonal communication study. He articulated a need for examining the roles of ideology and

epistemology as narratives in interpersonal communication that may not be linear. Lannamann reviewed scholarship in the field and speculated on how it may be broadened by an interwoven view of ideological or epistemological roots. This is the need for rhetorical listening called for in the work of Krista Ratcliff. As Lannamann put it: “While debates within an unquestioned ideological frame will undoubtedly yield important results, debates across ideological frames may open new territory and suggest new ways of connecting the field of communication to the practices of daily life” (198).

Marsha Houston’s agreement with Lannamann in her study of scholarship concerning African Americans, “Seeking Difference: African Americans in Interpersonal Communication Research, 1975 – 2000” opens a bridge from listening to interpersonal communication through intersectionality. Houston looks at research in interpersonal communication to see if Lannamann’s concern has been addressed when it comes to research involving African Americans. She found that often in that twenty-five-year period, it had not. Houston’s work sets us on a journey to think about interpersonal communication in African American communities across ideological stances and with an eye to history. Her essay also determined that much of the research still positions Black communities and Black conversations with the White hegemonic power structure as the frame.

Abolitionist letters necessarily address this hegemony but their voices of resistance across racial backgrounds serve as an important counter narrative giving rise to an understanding that Houston appreciates – the metanarrative was being challenged before the industrial age and the freedom of African Americans was the frame. Houston goes a step further and draws on Arthur Bochner and Carolyn Ellis to recognize research as a listening story, a rhetorical listening narrative in and of itself. That story, she asserted, had often found African American communication steeped in

the centrality of whiteness. She asks us to address this with four “touchstones for constructing emancipatory research narrative” They are: (1) practical and relational focus; (2) community cognizance; (3) holism and intersectionality; and (4) positionality and provisionality” (36). While addressing all four of Houston’s research touchstones would require a larger scope, her touchstones did influence this work in a few ways. One way was to consider a dialogic approach. If this research is a story, then it means there are many tellers and listeners who contribute to it and that the essence of the story comes out in the middle or what Buber would describe as the “in-between”. Another was to seek out voices within the African American community as well as White ones. Finally, her call to reinsert positionality as a factor in how the research is completed was resonant. We can reach back and see Houston’s listening intersectionality theory in the work of American abolitionists of the antebellum period.

Abolitionists wrote with this attending to varying ideological frames in mind and a rhetorical listening from the intersection that allowed them to eventually shake the core of the system. In their letters we find scientific study as some of them contend with suggestions that Black people were not in fact wholly human. Abolitionists engaged feminism, as many of them were suffragists supporting that movement alongside abolitionism. They span a variety of religious and political positions. Amy and Isaac Post were Quaker abolitionists fighting against what they saw as an ungodly injustice who leaned toward liberation of enslaved people through the Underground Railroad. They thought it was important for fugitive slaves to tell their stories and publish narratives depicting slave lives. John Brown was an evangelical who had left formal church membership and supported armed insurrection and encouraged revolt in African American communities. Their letters and others provide an appropriate text for studying interpersonal communication as Lannamann suggests. Stretching across ideological frames

requires us to look at components and origins, to find common traits and confirm differences. In forcing us to take stock of many dimensions and making connections to practices of daily life, efficacy and exigency emerge. This is the heart of the humanities, to look at the human condition and endeavor to connect what we see to ways in which we may foster flourishing. Brenda Allen brought this idea into the context of studying organizational communication and explained the transcendence that connects ethics of attunement to intersectionality.

### Listening, Intersectionality, and Organizational Communication

As an African-American woman, I consider the study of the abolitionist letters to be more than academic. They are part of an ethics of attunement that carries forward the intersectionality notion of *sankofa*. Even in research, there is an I-Thou that can offer transcendence if we may recognize the others as more than objects and, in my case, as persons who very much make me who I am. The understanding that without these letters and the work that accompanied them, my fingers on this keypad might be an impossibility, was staggering and contributed a layered understanding of interpersonal communication that is akin to the social scientific one of observer expectancy. From a humanities perspective it is richer. I am not only a variable to be considered in the analysis but perhaps even a desired outcome of the intentions of those whose letters I am reading; a desired outcome which they knew they could not guarantee but approached with dialogic faith and trust.

This is a faith and trust that is often discouraged or devalued in the world of organizational communication scholarship. Brenda Allen's research and re-introduction of dialogic ethics into theories of diversity, inclusion and equity in the workplace work in the intersection to reverse a representational intersectionality that binds listening. Allen has been committed to scholarship on intersectionality over the course of her career. She authored one of the very first series in the

field of organizational communication to tackle issues of difference and layered identity, *Difference Matters: Communicating Social Identity*. Her attention to women of color in the workforce picks up Crenshaw's structural intersectionality discourse and extends it with in-depth analyses of the experiences of women of color in organization settings. Allen asserted that there is a harmony necessary for diversity and inclusion to thrive in organizations. Diversity, inclusion and equity must be a component of all we do. We continue to see that tacking accessibility, diversity and inclusion features onto communication strategies programs after they have been planned is not effective. These should be part of the planning process and part of the planning team's expertise. Diversity, inclusion and equity must be a component of all we do. We continue to see that tacking accessibility, diversity and inclusion features onto development programs after they have been planned is not effective. These should be part of the planning process and part of the planning team's expertise. Allen also saw this as an important component of computer mediated communication (CMC) noting that "a full assessment of gender and CMC use requires more in-depth analysis" and that "researchers should assess gender in conjunction with other individual differences" (562). She includes race and ethnicity as well as job role, age and education in a list of possible other identifiers to consider. Here Allen is saying that gender differences in this study are important to look at because they tell us something about computer mediated listening which is a type of listening that is more and more pervasive in organizational settings. She resists generalizations and instead encourages a listening that is attentive to "attitudes and behaviors" that "probably stem from interactions among these variables" in other words, the lived experiences within the texture of the intersection can provide for deeper understanding of the overall computer mediated communication dynamics. Her attention to this is a praxis of ethics of attunement that bridges intersectionality to organizational communication.

The spheres of interpersonal communication and organizational communication fan out to others and point to epistemic values in broader contexts that come back to social constructs.

### Listening, Intersectionality, and Rhetorical Studies

The cultural logic explored in rhetorical listening is a sedimenting that happens in language and the concern of rhetorical studies is often to focus on that sedimenting in the sense that it can be cracked apart and re-examined. In the case of the abolitionists, the letters and decisions to make them public form a fanning from the interpersonal into the rhetorical public sphere. In the case of organizational communication issues in workplaces and schools, the language and codes of institutions begin to have blurred edges and also fold into the public sphere. Rhetorical studies has a range of vocabulary that recognizes this and explores public spheres, their transformations, their reticulate natures and their problems (Lipmann, Dewey, Habermas, Hauser). The intersectionality aspects of this transformation is found often in the work of Deborah Atwater. Atwater explores the contours and highlights of Black rhetorics and Black public spheres. She does this with deft layering of intersectionality that calls scholars to consider roles of women, class issues and a fighting against cultural hegemony in language that can become a political intersectionality battle in which we deny African aspects of African-American rhetorics. As she wrote in “A Dilemma of Black Communication Scholars: The Challenge of Finding New Rhetorical Tools” there is a need for different tools with which to analyze Black rhetoric. She offers that “a suitable model for Afrocentric communication theory would be the *Nhiwatiwa* Wheel of Involved Communication, for there is no source or audience everyone is involved in except the complementary relating of experiences unified by Nommo” (8). Atwater also noted that the *Nhiwatiwa* Wheel is not the same as some of the models of communication that are typically covered in canonical readings, “but it should if it is truly to represent the Black

communication experience” (8). Like Atwater and Ratcliffe, she asserted that this difference and a willingness to listen for it are good tools to combat narrow mindedness: “Many of the articles on Black rhetoric do not always take an Afrocentric perspective and consequently generalizations are made by those who have viewed one small segment of the Black experience” (9).

This statement takes on the status quo of academic writing on rhetoric and challenges it to the standard of humility invoked by Moraga and Arneson. A humility that accepts other world views may be appropriate lenses for examining rhetorical situations faced by minorities. This statement also effectively pulls together the ethics of attunement theorized by Lipari. Atwater is at once practicing and theorizing listening as an uplifting force of intersectionality here. The *Nhiwatiwa* wheel affirms the intersection and its ability to reinforce rhetoric that is as much about the orator as it is about the audience and is as much about listening for right timing and a call to action as it is about the discourse. This is also evident in Atwater’s writing about public memory wherein she calls us to that rhetorical lens to look at listening in the intersectional context as transformation.

Atwater and Herndon wrote about public memory having two cultures- one official and one vernacular. As Lester Olson noted in his article examining Audre Lorde’s speech “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”, “Breaking Silence is a necessary condition for overcoming internalized shame or for acknowledging and bridging differences in the interest of combatting wrongful deeds, but it is not a sufficient condition. We have evidence in the historical record of how well we listen to such voices. But listening is always a difficult activity, especially when the perception of differences is great, especially when differences in underlying cultural experiences may shape our very abilities to listen” (64).



In her book on the rhetoric of Black mayors, Atwater profiles the mayors and draws out understanding based on their own words and their day-to-day experiences. She recognizes commonalities between them but also listens for their unique stories. She also discusses their successes or failures in the context of their abilities to be good listeners. James Sills who served as mayor of Wilmington Delaware reported that being a good listener was one of the key qualifiers for the position. Atwater finds that if Black candidates are to be successful in mayoral positions going forward, they must listen to and value the lived experiences of a diverse group of constituents.

Similarly, Atwater heralds the listening ability of civil rights icon and pioneer Septima Clark who built a coalition of African-American voters in the Sea Islands communities of South Carolina during the early first half of the 20th century. In 1916, she began taking on voter suppression by forming schools that taught citizens to read, write and understand the basics of civic responsibility. The act of teaching community members to read and write was a definitive act of listening. Through her listening, Clark changed the tide of oppression in the American south. But as a woman, she found herself in the intersection and being skipped over for leadership positions. Atwater explained that Clark recognized this dichotomy and had to develop ways to encourage civil rights leaders to listen to her and trust her plans.

Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston in *Applied Communication Studies*

The union and syncopation of listening and intersectionality suggests that not only is listening integral to an intersectionality that works to uplift people but that viewing communication itself holistically is a construct that requires a view from the intersection, that not only can intersectionality have a rhetorical manner but that the manner of rhetoric, indeed the manner of communication when looked at holistically is intersectional. This kind of intersectionality enacts

listening by pointing to transcendence and committing to the importance of lived experience.

Listening by intersectionality engages social scientific approaches as well but does not privilege those approaches over analysis of lived experience and phenomenological accounting. Listening from the intersection, by intersectionality and with intersectionality is collective, constructive and a hermeneutic approach that expands rather than contracting. The scholars featured in this study demonstrate that repeatedly for us.

In her dissertation, Houston offered a codification and theorizing of one of the most salient and restorative practices of Black women engaged in language-action, a practice called code switching. Houston recognized this attention to the absence of research specific to the experiences and communication of Black women. This is a skillfulness her dissertation advisor, Fern Johnson, details as follows: “The impact of Marsha’s work stems from her deft ability to draw on literatures focused separately on gender and on race, to integrate linguistic and communicative study, and to discuss the historical context and continuity of Black women’s language” (Giving). This work led to a groundbreaking article “Language and Black Women’s Place” appearing in the 1985 anthology *For Alma Mater: Theory and Practice in Feminist Scholarship* which Fern Johnson described as being “immediately recognized by a small number of gender and language specialists in our field who were just beginning to think about the complex entailments of gender and race” (19).

Johnson also touts her student as the first “communication scholar to articulate a perspective and report research focused on African American women’s language strategies.”

“Language and Black Women’s Place” is a nod and invitation to think about feminist theory in a more inclusive manner. The title is a riff on the book *Language and Woman’s Place* published by Robin Lakoff in 1975. Lakoff’s book is a first contemporary socio-linguistic look at many

elements of women's language that are widely recognized as performative of the fear and oppression of sexist societies. Lakoff framed such linguistic moves as excessive apology, intense focus on "right" language such as correct grammar and spelling, and indirect modes that hedge and hint at needs rather than definitively assert them. Houston's work is a simple and beautiful question that is unapologetic, loyal only to the grammar of experience, and assertive of a specific set of points. Those points are 1- Black women employ language differently and deserve to be heard within feminist theory as well. 2- Black women have unique contributions to the "Black" experience and deserve to be heard as part of the burgeoning literature on African-American rhetoric. And 3- These two assertions are not independent of one another and should be looked at as a phenomenon that intensifies many Black women's experiences with language. This, Houston's introductory work in the field, is a direct link to Crenshaw's articulation of intersectionality. "Language and Black Women's Place" established Marsha Houston as a scholar committed to the area of intersectionality. As Janice Hamlet mentioned in her tribute to Marsha Houston's mentorship: "I have learned from Dr. Houston's example that I do not have to choose to be either a part of the women's agenda or the Black agenda. I must be a necessary part of both" ("Giving"). Houston embraced Crenshaw's term with elegance, generosity and solidarity as her work continued. Her subsequent scholarship maintained focus on making the issues of African American women visible and de-marginalized.

In "Writing for My Life", Houston further affirms her commitment to lived experience and transcendence by stating: My primary scholarly focus is on communicators and the politics of their communicative lives, rather than on abstract communication phenomena. Instead of centering my work on a concept, for example, uncertainty reduction, communication apprehension, or compliance-gaining, and endeavoring to uncover what is 'universal' (or at least

generalizable) about such scholarly inventions, I center African-American women as communities of speakers, endeavoring both to illumine our specific communicative experiences and to demonstrate how understanding our communicative lives enlarges comprehension of human communication (677).

Again, Davis supports this in her tribute to Houston saying she “has cleared the way for scholars representing other marginalized voices to begin a conversation of organizing, of building coalitions, and of situating their lived experience as legitimate study” (“Giving”).

This awareness also opens the door to a valuing of lived experience which produces what Pat Arneson described in her work as bringing to light “the comprehensiveness of experience that informs communicative engagement” (44). We see this engagement come forth in the other features of listening and intersectionality. Communicative engagement that demands listening to multiple communities and voices is perhaps the most fragile and tenuous of these features.

Brenda Allen experienced a need to do this when one of her former students, an African American male, was accused of rape. She wrote “Some members of the Black community wanted me to support the student when he was barred from campus prior to his trial, and women’s groups wanted me to support their position that the student should not be allowed on campus” (x).

What happens to listening when we feel the tearing and tension of the political intersection? I think what happens is that we end up with an expanded need for discussion and dialogue. Too often, we want our positions to be encapsulated we want hashtags and soundbytes. We want simple messages that can be distilled in both their media and their content. What’s most interesting about this to me is that we have scholars who abandoned the sender-message-receiver model long ago. Like Stuart Hall, many of them accounted for a range of rhetorical situational

issues that converge on the event of a speech act and create an enlarged sphere of understanding surrounding that is narrative. Narrative's logos is complex and amorphous. Allen also recognizes this in not only service or administration issues but also in scholarship issues. She explain how a reviewer once sent her a revision letter in which a reviewer had instructed her not to use first person. For marginalized people, the request to eliminate ourselves from the writing becomes a refusal to listen, a silencing.

#### Autoethnographic Notes

Personal erasure from a work is something I relate to on a deep level. I have had courses wherein I wrote about imprisonment, an institution that affects me to my core. The writing was painful but I tackled it because I felt the pressure of the intersection and was indeed writing for my life. I had to step away from Cicero and Aristotle and write about something that would save my academic life by allowing me to dig and care. I did it and it went so well that I committed to continuing. The instructor noted for me that the choice to remove myself from the brackets was one to take seriously but she did not chastise me for it. Imagine my incredible surprise when a year later as I began to expand my knowledge and interest in imprisonment, I received this same feedback from a professor with the accompanying chastisement that had not been there before. His criticism of my writing came as no surprise. Writing is hard and frankly, I had become accustomed to White men telling me I did not do it very well. I recognized that often these men had been socialized to believe they were worthy of teaching someone else to write by virtue of the fact that they themselves had been published so many times. I do not believe it ever occurred to them that the grit they perceived themselves as having might actually not exist at all. That perhaps the reason they continued to be published was simply because they already had been and perhaps the reason they had been was because someone else had made it possible for them either

by being a teacher who wanted to see them be successful and therefore made a way out of no way by calling in favors from editors and reviewers or by the citation machine. Not the citation machine that students use now to create the kinds of works cited and reference sections we can agree meet decent standards. The citation machine that insists if you are writing about “a” you must include “b” because the subject of “a” belongs to scholar “b” and if you do not cite him (of course the scholar is him) then you have not actually written about “a” at all. So the citation machine turned its cogs and made scholars out of new writers but boy did they look a lot like the ones who came before them which serves to canonize people in a systemically racist, sexist and elitist manner. Interestingly something the instructor said to me stuck. He told me that I cannot write about prison as if I am an expert.” This was true in some regard. I realized that I had indeed been taking the position of expert. After all, my father, uncles and a brother had all been imprisoned at some point. I spent several of my undergraduate years visiting my brother in prison on weekends completing readings as I took the three hour long bus ride back to campus and then there was the time when my toddler nephew, my brother’s only son, tragically died in a house fire. He had been hiding under his bed from the flames and the step-grandmother who was caring for him but unfortunately not mentally well, did not remember that he had been in the house when she left whatever she was cooking on the stove. By the time she remembered and alerted the firemen, it was too late to save my nephew’s life. My nephew’s mother was in prison then as well and so grandparents were my nephew’s lot. My brother was at that moment imprisoned in more than a physical space. But if this experience had not made me an expert then perhaps the fact that my father, uncles, brother and others I knew in prison were part of a legacy of enslavement that continued when the 13th amendment allowed for enslavement in cases where a person had committed a crime and therefore continued the legacy into which my very

existence as a Black American born woman was woven. This was a legacy of imprisonment as backdrop to life. But no, I should not have presumed to be an expert. Foucault, now there was an expert. I was instructed to read (presumptuous) and add Foucault. I did. The paper was deemed better but not great. But again, he was right. This expertise I claimed over imprisonment had to stop. During that semester I began to recognize that I had some strengths. So many personal things crashed around me and even more still seeded and bloomed. I figured out that I was very familiar with oppression, but I was even more familiar with survival and that was the expertise of intersectionality. An expertise I had to sharpen and explore. And if communication ethics or philosophy of communication were going to survive as a field in the face of its own oppression of intersectionality, folks like me were going to need to step up and show how.

Brenda Allen has paved the way for this kind of response to intersectionality with scholarship she denoted as “twice blessed”. She acknowledges the layered oppression she has faced in situations where her position as a Black woman either pulled her in two different directions or compounded issues in ways that were more than added or multiplied. However, in her work she calls for an expansion of scholarship that explores listening in twice blessed versions of the stories.

Listening by intersectionality is also the ability to recognize where your position in the intersection ends and others experience an extension. We do not all occupy the same space at the same time. Allen demonstrates this in her work:

I usually don't have to contend with anyone questioning my sex or gender. I realized that when I engage in self-discipline to perform feminine identity, regardless of my choices, I have the dubious advantage of an admittedly socially-constructed female body, plus a relatively effective script for performing femininity, which means that few will challenge or question that

performance. Unlike most of the co-researchers, I usually don't have to fear that someone is going to challenge my gender identity” (Reflections 126).

Here Allen uses intersectionality to recognize internalized biases and embrace a challenge to continue listening to others in the process of social justice. She embodied the theory of rhetorical listening as she described “reminding myself that dominant discourses have socialized me to react negatively, and I strengthen my resolve to continue rewriting my inner scripts, and to seek social justice” (125). This spirit is also an inherited one from other women who blazed the intersectional trail. We find it in the words of Coretta Scott King “Struggle is a never-ending process. Freedom is never really won. You earn it and win it in every generation” (King: My Life with MLK x).

Writing within a modality of listening and intersectionality invites communication scholars to resist the privileges of methodological entrenchment. Connecting listening and intersectionality is a research stance. As Marsha Houston recognizes “Although social scientific research has generated an important foundation for scholarship regarding race, it lacks the ability to provide descriptive insight into individuals’ communicative experiences” (Houston, 1989). In some settings this might be mistaken for simply a mixed-methods approach, in others hermeneutic or story-laden. This listening by intersectionality as a research method offers an approach that is both and more. This approach embraces limitations and asks where they are, why they exist and who is not in the conversation. Listening by intersectionality does not assume that answers are there but simply undiscovered or that a relationship of any sort can be made that would provide answers. Transience and inexplicability are fully recognized as part of the nature of our existence in the intersection. A rhetorical intersectionality approach points to that missing effability and the invisibility it might engender is part of the process of reclaiming voice.



In *Centering Ourselves* there is an article that approaches intersectionality themes without mention of Crenshaw. The authors take a phenomenological look at the everyday experiences of Black women and find several salient themes. The first set of themes they find are collected as representations of multiple consciousness issues. These included communicating in the midst of multiple oppressions, communication with Euro-Americans, expectations of others and resisting the hegemonic messages of dominant society. The second set are described as a “natural connection” among African-American women. These included a distinction between connection or bond, the diversity of African American women and a sense of spirituality (141-142). A lot of what is being described in this piece is intersectional. Many of the experiences point to the structural, political and representational forces of intersectionality and the authors begin an articulation of the ways in which African American women manage, control and even direct from within the intersection. A Crenshaw addition to this piece would be fruitful in order to further consider categorizations and forces that are being pushed against.

Communication scholars are going to have to consider intersectionality as we grapple with the outcome of the 2016 US presidential election. A grand assumption is that there is a public sphere of women and that public sphere was anti-Trump. This is a false claim and one that can cost social justice wins. There is also a notion that women who did vote for Trump or express support for him were “husband voting” meaning they were casting their votes based on what they thought their husbands or male significant others would want them to do. I also believe this to be errant and presumptuous. Moreover, much of the discussion of the women who voted for Donald Trump assumes a position in which woman means to be White, heterosexual and middle or upper middle class. This is an assumption that will work squarely in the realm of political intersectionality. The stance silences voices and makes issues specifically ones that need to be

highlighted for White women. Some of the issues at stake include health care, reproductive rights, and education. For sure, these are issues that have an impact on people regardless of gender, but they will likely have gendered texts and tones. And those tones will largely be White. There will be other issues that will become serious intersectionality ground testers. Those will include immigration, police brutality, and financial regulations like tax law. Again, these issues are not unique to women in the margins but the impact they will have will be amplified by gender, race and class. “Promise Keepers could not attract a diverse audience because Promise Keepers was not a group for men; it was a group for a particular type of man” (75).

In Luke Winslow’s article about the rhetoric of othering in the 1990s Promise Keepers movement, he recognizes that the representation of manhood in the group’s rhetoric is highly racialized. The honor of manhood and conservative valuing took on a racialized tone in many ways. One way was to ignore the intersection; to assert that the concerns the group was addressing did not need to include racism. Winslow strikes at the heart of the othering complex in the United States noting the intersectional nature of identity here: “We live in a world of multiple identities, hybridity, and fragmentation. One is never just a “man,” in the same way one is never just “White.” One must also be a White man or a Black man, Asian or Latinx. Gender identity is inevitably raced, just as race is always filtered through a gendered lens (C. Crenshaw; K. Crenshaw; Dace).” His application of this theoretical framework to the case of the Promise Keeper organization trying to forge what they called racial reconciliation raises an important question about the role of intersectionality in bringing people together. An area that begs investigation is whether the ability to be uplifting is dependent on an ability to define or create an intersectionality rhetorical sphere. Trying to apply it to an existing sphere, especially one so deeply rooted in the very structures that support intersectional oppression, was impossible.

However, an important lesson from this case study is that intersectionality is about more than how women of color are affected. This case is also about how the effect on women then transfers to others, including men responding to themes of claims to Christianity and toxic masculinity. This search for a Christianity that would be more aggressive and perceived male has an impact on the marginalization of women of color. “His aim was to challenge the image of the Christian male as a “henpecked wimp,” as he inveighed against a “dainty, sissified, lily-livered piety” Christianity (Balmer, “Blessed” 79; Kimmel 113; Harrell 197; Longwood 5). 81 Winslow also addresses style as a major component of othering.

Working within the theme of difference, McDonald is asserting that we need to work in constant movement to resist sedimenting of normalcy in notions of identity. He also emphasizes the need to pay attention to how this sedimentation occurs in the everyday interactions and exchanges of organizational sphere members, rather than in large -scale readily identifiable offending events. He further explained this through “Acker’s (2006) notion of inequality regimes posits that inequalities related to gender, race, and class are reproduced in everyday organizational life through processes such as informal interactions, recruitment practices, and wage setting and supervisory practices” (314). He calls his approach to intersectionality an anti-categorical one. The question that remains then is whether this deconstructionist approach employs a certain level of privilege in and of itself. How do we address the very real issue of many women not being able to assume an anti-categorical stance because it would push them further back into margins and risk erasure of identity?

In a sense this is a representational and political intersectionality of intersectionality itself. If we silence stories within the theory and applications in order to claim a position in which we seek to

remove hyper focus on particular indexes, do we then diminish the needs and historical tenor of the struggles? Rhetorical intersectionality may have a response to this as well.

Like intersectionality in general, categories of its oppressive manifestations often overlap and interlock. Phenomena may bear the markings of structural, representational and/or political intersectionality at work and different manners may actually reinforce one another. In the chapters where we discuss the different types, I do not mean at all to suggest that the examples and illustrations I am offering are relegated to one particular kind of intersectionality. Rather, I mean to look at prominent features and use the most readily identifiable manner of intersectional oppression to develop and explore fitting communicative action responses. In the final chapter, I will explore how these listening intersectionality metaphors along with the earlier ones of silence and *parrhesia* define and open rhetorical intersectionality.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### RECLAIMING RHETORICAL INTERSECTIONALITY

Reclaiming is a term used here to indicate that while the oppressive structural, political, and representational intersectionality forms exist rhetorically, this does not have to go unanswered. Exclusionary rhetorical intersectionality can be reclaimed through breaking silence, practicing *parrhesia* and attuned listening. The use of the term reclaiming has deeper meaning in contemporary context because of U.S. Representative Maxine Waters' use of the House rule that allows a congresswoman to reclaim time being used to answer a question posed by her if she'd like the time to be used in a different way. During a House Financial Services Committee hearing in July of 2017, Congresswoman Waters asked then Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to explain why no one from his office had responded to a letter requesting information about President Trump. Committee members get a set amount of time to question a witness and Waters seemed to recognize a game Mnuchin was playing in which he would speak about anything but her question, including offering her gratitude for her service to California, and thus run out of time to provide her with a direct answer. Representative Waters repeatedly invoked her right to reclaim the time and direct Mr. Mnuchin to answer the question she had asked. She reclaimed the rhetorical space turned this political intersectionality attempt into an intersectionality that uplifted marginalized people throughout the United States.

Maxine Waters' call for reclaiming is one recent example of turning intersectionality into a phenomenon of inclusive power and action. In expanding intersectionality to consider this phenomenon as a rhetorical construct, I addressed how silence can be broken and reclaimed, uncovered the power of *parrhesia*, and, I discussed listening as a

communication act that is edifying and restorative. I propose the following tenets of rhetorical intersectionality as a framework for reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality.

1. Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality is defined by a freedom from the limitations of feminism constructed only by White women, anti-racism constructed only by men, and economic justice movements that profess to be color or gender blind.
2. Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality begins with the possibilities of inviting others to the perspectives of poor women of color who may also have other marginalizing identity issues.
3. Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality is not exclusively an academic area but calls for study and theoretical work as well as community engagement and activism.
4. Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality is a communicative scholar-activist movement to overcome oppression. The movement's roots are in the United States, but its powerful uplift can be felt and observed in other societies as well.
5. Rhetorical intersectionality is not only a study of oppression, but also a study of overcoming oppression. Rhetorical intersectionality is a study and practice of survival and thriving.
6. Rhetorical intersectionality is not only a study of societal patterns, but also a study of patterns and divergences in lived experiences.
7. Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality is the "transformation of silence into language and action" (Lorde).
8. Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality invites people who do not experience structural, political or representational intersectionality to join and commune with others who do. This means that White women who have enjoyed the privileges and benefits of racism are invited to unite with women of color. Men who have benefitted from patriarchy and rich women are invited to join hands with women who have been shackled by poverty.

9. Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality is an opportunity to include people who do not identify on the gender binary either because of their bodies' physical characteristics or because their socialized performances of gender have transitioned away from either man or woman as a descriptor. And, rhetorical intersectionality means that straight people are invited to remove the lens of heteronormativity that pervades social language (*parole*).

10. Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality is the reclamation of the power of language as a phenomenon and force of elevation and growth.

### Sowing Rhetorical Intersectionality

Sowing is sometimes thought of as a metaphor that is inherently masculine. I use it in accordance with the womanist standpoint of Alice Walker as she describes the reclamation of rhetorical space and communicative elements that arise from this position as gardening. Resisting structural, political and representational intersectionality is illustrated in many ways that contribute to reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality. Walker put together a collection of her thoughts on a womanist approach that goes in search of how our foremothers wrote and produced art that reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality. In *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* revisits writers and artists like Zora Neale Hurston and Nella Larsen who had been forgotten or dismissed. Walker is particularly interested in Black women's ability to create in the face of tyranny. She is particularly interested in their rhetorical intersectionality though she does not use this term. Walker explains that she was looking for the creativity and work left behind by Black women in literature and art. She was reminded that this search required looking both "high and low" (1). Walker states "And yet, it is to my mother - and all our mothers who were not famous - that I went in search of the secret of what has fed that muzzled and often mutilated, but vibrant, creative spirit that the Black woman has inherited, and that pops out in wild and unlikely places

to this day” (1). She describes her mother’s own artistry as a gardener who was known across several counties for the beautiful flowers she grew. Walker notes her mother’s position in the intersection - poor, Black and female. She focuses on how her gardening uplifted her and uplifted others who came to get floral arrangements or spend time learning from her mother in the garden, Walker writes:

I remember people coming to my mother's yard to be given cuttings from her flowers; I hear again the praise showered on her because whatever rocky soil she landed on, she turned into a garden. A garden so brilliant with colors, so original in its design, so magnificent with life and creativity, that to this day people drive by our house in Georgia - perfect strangers and imperfect strangers - and ask to stand or walk among my mother's art (3).

The work of rhetorical intersectionality is a sowing work as well. To grow rhetorical intersectionality, we plant seeds of history and *sankofa* in the soil of silence and water it with reclamation. We plant seeds of self-care and *ubuntu* in the soil of *parrhesia* and water it with author-community awareness. We plant the attunement seeds of resonance and *kairos* in the soil of listening and water it with transcendence. We add the sunlight of acknowledgment and grow rhetorical intersectionality as a place where visitors can join us and witness the beauty of survival, defined by Ms. Lauryn Hill as “staying alive in the face of opposition” (“Forgive Them Father”). We celebrate that we have not only survived but also thrived. We plant these seeds and enact rhetorical intersectionality.

Rhetorical intersectionality is enacted through the examination of silence; the reclamation of it in places where it was used as language and the breaking of it to get free. This is accomplished through author-community awareness and reclamation. Rhetorical intersectionality lays claim to



spaces where these voices have been drowned out, remembers voices from the past and honors unsung heroes. Rhetorical intersectionality is enacted through courageous speech in the face of danger or loss. Rhetorical intersectionality is enacted through listening with empathy and compassion. This is accomplished through commitment to and privileging of lived experience. We sow rhetorical intersectionality by translating silence into language and action in acts of transcendence and inclusion that keep a watchful eye to the future. We reap rhetorical intersectionality when we are willing to challenge assumptions and formations of margins. Our challenges give rise to a new discourse and question sedimented cultural logics. As Robin Patric Clair puts it “Each of these challenges, to each other and to systems of domination, are only a few of the ways in which silence is shattered as oppression and reorganized as resistance” (190).

#### The Exigence of Reclaiming Rhetorical Intersectionality

Reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality is a revolutionary praxis in the field of communication. We have years of intersectionality study that has sought to understand the nature of oppression. Rhetorical intersectionality is a gathering and an invitation to study of the nature of survival and thriving in the face of nothing short of attempted genocide. Rhetorical intersectionality can act as a lens for literature review, a methodology for quantitative research, an approach for hermeneutic investigations and, perhaps most importantly, a disciplinary self-reflection meant to ask ourselves how we are really doing as a community of scholars with a duty to look fully and openly at human experience as the very nature of what we do. Finally, rhetorical intersectionality can be healing for the wounds of socially constructed systems that have supported or led to oppression.

We live in a time when the call to participate in this healing is loud and urgent. The exigence of women and children attempting to enter the frontier of American life, sometimes with men,

sometimes without them, and being caged because of the vestiges of race and class that continue to hang on in the American imaginary is an intersectional problem. The exigence of entire cities or sections of cities being under siege in environmental oppression that prevents their citizens from getting clean water to drink or clean air to breathe suggests an intersectional problem of war on poor people where we were supposed to be waging war on poverty. Corporations and organizations must face the layers of problems their environmental oppression places on poor people so often represented in communities of color like Flint Michigan or the Monongahela Valley of Western Pennsylvania. Responses from the intersection and a collective of people joining in the intersection have been growing. It is urgent that communication scholarship mobilize around rhetorical intersectionality.

These explorations are important for communication scholarship. The study of marginal or vernacular discourses provides for a more complete study of topics in the field of communication as a whole. The inclusion of marginal voices is both ethically and academically necessary.

Without it, we do not have sound academic work and we ignore the ethical call to which we are bound thus invalidating our scholarship and our philosophical claims. Ono and Sloop have called scholars to “a critical orientation toward discourse that puts into question the very concept of marginalization while asking rhetoricians to refocus their mode of inquiry toward localized discourses through which cultural discourse is coordinated” (39). Brenda Allen, Deborah Atwater, and Marsha Houston along with the beautiful array of other scholars inviting us to rhetorical intersectionality understand this. We must intentionally push against margins and push into the mainstream our own senses of communicative engagement and meaning-making.

Allen wrote “Since 1989, I have been a faculty member of a department of communication at a predominantly White university. In 1997, I earned tenure. My work focuses primarily on

organizational communication and issues of difference. Reading, writing, and teaching feminist standpoint theory elicited consciousness-raising for me. I recognized how I have been oppressed (I was in deep denial), how I have been complicit, and how I have resisted. My reflections and revelations forced me to recognize my own multiple inner voices that stem from various aspects of my identity and their intersections. I've grown to understand that I have agency, more than my ancestors, but not as much as I hope for those who are unborn ("Black Womanhood" 578).

This passage is a declaration of intersectional recognition and force. Here she takes the effects of political intersectionality and recognizes that this phenomenon had such a deep impact on her own life that she was unable to completely acknowledge the oppression she herself faced. Her willingness to speak and write openly about her experiences constitutes a reversal of that force, a resistance and its components provide us with additional understanding of the markers and features of rhetorical intersectionality.

Since the early 1990s, communications scholars interested in intersectionality have had a series of exchanges that open up discussion about a range of experiences in intersections and connect different spheres of people to one another. Creating this network of intersectional communities and rhetorical spheres (Hauser) offers the ability to reverse the force of intersectionality so that rather having it be something that is oppressive we create something that is uplifting and that becomes a force of justice. While Communication scholarship on intersectionality is broad and impossible to fully capture in this one work, recognizing rhetorical intersectionality as an area of study opens the door to a full realm of work. I recommend Communication departments and schools begin by offering Rhetorical Intersectionality as a course sequence covering theory, research methods and creative or applied work.

More intersectionality work is needed in both the subjects of rhetorical research as well as in the conduct of it. We have to support communication research that affirms the intersectional positions of scholars and eliminates the silences that ensue when we bracket the lived experiences of the researchers. This begs discussion of issues like what constitutes “real” research and where is the proper space for such research often times leading to a rejection of this kind of scholarship and/or relegation of it to “special issues” which is a form of marginalization. Breaking down these margins and inviting such scholarship into the various spheres of communication theory and research will enrich commitments to inclusion and enrich the older scholarship as well with multifocal lenses. We also need more research about listening to women in the intersection. There is much research on our voices, sense of self and entry into public spaces. Research on listening and dialogue that has proven to foster more inclusive and margin busting relationships is not as abundant. One example of this is found in Marsha Houston’s discussion of her relationship with her mentor and dissertation advisor. One wonders what elements made this relationship work so well. Are there rhetorical listening metaphors we can explore more explicitly to advance social justice for women affected by intersectionality and if so, how can intersectionality be a vehicle for creating greater research on listening in the field. Crenshaw explained the stakes of this in her cautions against the narrative of a post-racial society. She stated:

The loss is not simply material and discursive, it is political as well. Without some version of a racial justice frame, the possibilities for collective action are similarly jettisoned. Moreover, this abandoned space does not remain narrative-free. As post-racialism takes racial injustice out of the equation, it also widens the bandwidth of other race discourses that naturalize the status quo-recast and rebranded but effectively serving

the same purposes as the biological and cultural explanations of the past.” (“Post-Racial” 34)

In addition to having course sequences on rhetorical intersectionality, communication scholars should seek to have it represented as a concentration area at our various state and regional associations as well as in the National Communication Association. Imagine not having to choose between the identities that make us who we are but also being able to have them recognized in the field as we join for conferences and conventions. I do not mean to suggest that intersectionality discussions are not happening at our events. I am saying we need to name them, gather them, commemorate them and give them due space. We must also be willing to, as Walker suggests, do this “high and low” so as a conclusion to this project, I offer a glimpse in my own garden: my relationships with the people of the Woodland Hills School District of Western Pennsylvania. In this school district, I have worked as a member of the public sphere in the wake of severely exclusion-oriented rhetoric. The following narrative is representative of how I find ways to grow flowers and offer them to others in the community we call Woodland Hills.

Reclaiming Rhetorical Intersectionality in Everyday Life: The Woodland Hills School District  
“AND NOW, this 28th day of April, 1981, it is hereby ORDERED that the public schools in the districts named herein in central eastern Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, shall be desegregated, effective in the beginning of the first semester of the school year, 1981-1982” (Dorothy Hoots et al v. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 1981).

***Attuned Listening.*** Last year my daughters told me two captivating stories that reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality by *sankofa* and transcendence. The first story was about an African-American woman named Henrietta Lacks. Mrs. Lacks was 31 years old when she succumbed to

cervical cancer. Doctors at Johns Hopkins University Medical Center had collected cell samples from her and discovered that they lived indefinitely, making them invaluable resources for medical and other scientific research. They became known as “HeLa” cells and would become essential to several medical breakthroughs, including the development of the polio vaccine which has been a generational game changer effectively near-eradicating polio across the world (Skloot). Interestingly, I knew of Jonas Salk, his life and his accomplishments but had never heard of Henrietta Lacks. She had been broken down into pieces; parts that managed to live on and save the world; parts that, like her very name, were chopped from their narrative and used to advance the agenda of human flourishing. Whether that flourishing included her or Black women like her was inconsequential and uninteresting to too many people. The story remained in the margins created by race, class, and gender discriminations. Her condition was made possible by this intersectional system of oppression in which Lacks had been placed. The story broke my heart and put it back together again at the same time. The story also made me wonder at her amazing superpower and wonder how it could be that so many Black women still suffer and die of diseases unique to or endemic to our heritage. How could it be that HeLa cells had created a vaccine for polio, mapped the human genome and cloned existence (Masters) but not yet cured fibroid development (Wright) or kept Black women from dying of breast cancer at disproportionately higher rates than our White counterparts? (DeSantis et al) I also wondered how it could be that I had never been educated about this woman. Missing Lacks from the story of scientific advancement in medicine was a silencing influenced by and reinforcing political intersectionality. I also wondered how it could be that my daughters further explained to me that they had not heard the story in an educational context either but rather in a snippet interview of a Black celebrity on a five-minute talk radio segment. Not a data-supported biology text, but a

heralded journalistic narrative offered by a humanities scholar. This pivoted our discussion to missing narratives and how we could resist this political intersectionality in education. My daughters recognized that this moment of *akroasis* and *kairos* in which people were listening to the forgotten narratives of people who impacted history from below the intersection was a right time for reclamation of the rhetorical space and a call for an end to oppressive practices not only in the curriculum at their school but in some administrative practices.

Thus, the second story they told me was about their principal. He was accused of having threatened to physically harm a student. This was connected to subsequent stories about several school resource officers, employees of privately held security firms and local police, who had been found on video surveillance beating African American students. This echoed the issues of racism in nationally reported police brutality stories. And like those stories, there was a silence surrounding the experiences of African-American girls. The school district was now the defendant in a lawsuit which charged that the district had “created and/or acquiesced in a culture of verbal abuse, excessive force and intimidation which resulted in harm to Student Plaintiffs” (Minor Plaintiffs v. Woodland Hills et al). This culture had been seeded and grown over the years since the district had been formed in the wake of another suit, 1981’s *Hoots v. PA*, that forced the district to desegregate the schools.

***History from below.*** Dorothy Hoots, along with Addrallace Knight, Barbara Smith, Mae Helen Woody, and Juanita Jordan were women living in Black neighborhoods of the Monongahela Valley in Western Pennsylvania with children attending schools in the 1970s. Together, they sued the state to desegregate their local districts and foster educational equity. The Neighborhood Legal Services organization assisted them with multiple hearings and challenges from local constituents. Their fight began in 1973, reached a zenith in 1981 when a judge ruled that the

districting was indeed racially segregated and ordered local districts to unify. The Woodland Hills School District did not demonstrate progress on this until 2003 when a federal court finally ruled that oversight was no longer necessary to ensure the district would not continue de facto segregation practices (Welner 225). The courage of these women to continue fighting for decades on behalf of their own children and generations after them is an incredible story of reclaiming rhetorical intersectionality as it is enacted in the language structures of education. This *Nhiwatiwa* wheel approach to fostering equity and continuing the need for voices to rise from the intersection began a work that called for continuance in the wake of the new accusations against district administrators.

The student who accused the principal of threatening him and the ones on the tapes we were seeing were all boys. The case includes one girl. I immediately wondered what the experiences of other Black girls were like. I thought of Mrs. Lacks and wondered if their experiences had been chopped up into data bits or quotation testimonials. My daughters ended this story with “so now we are on the national news.” They had voiced concerns in the past about the school’s reputation and media image. My daughters understood that they had a political and representational intersectionality problem with how the media interacted with the school. I offered them the opportunity to go elsewhere. One of them looked at me and said flatly “nope.” The other said “Mom, if students like us leave, what will happen to the school then?” They both expressed the sense that the school not only belonged to them but that they had a responsibility to it. I was inspired by and curious about their convictions. Where had they come from? Did anyone at the school district recognize their commitments? If I related their stories, would the narratives be valued, or was their only worth in their GPAs, standardized testing scores, and demographic information which are so often proudly anonymized and stripped from personal



embodiment. Would my daughters' educational lives be reduced to scientific data points represented as boiled down versions of their first and last names: "BiAb" and "HajAb"?

This convergence of conversations with my daughters about Henrietta Lacks, the oppression of Black students at their school and the attempt to provide equal educational opportunities for students of color and White students was occurring more than 60 years after Thurgood Marshall successfully argued the case of *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. There we stood more than two generations beyond the assertion that proposing to serve citizens in a manner that would be separated but equal was inherently flawed. As a nation, we had long since established that segregation and inequality were linked. The agenda to end the practices of segregation in the United States seemed a given cultural good. As we considered these stories and the contexts of 1- a scientific community that had hidden their reliance on a Black woman's physical contributions not only from the public but from Lacks and her family as well; 2- an educational system that had failed to tell us such an amazing story; and 3- personal familiarity with the failure of the desegregation agenda (Failer et al and Vergon), we wondered what had gone wrong and we recognized that so many others were wondering too. We decided to reprise the roles of Black women activists that had been filled by so many predecessors and indeed is being filled by so many contemporaries.

***Practicing Parrhesia.*** This dissertation proposes an area of study that would address and validate the rhetorical situation in which we of the Woodland Hills School District find ourselves; a situation that is defined by intersectionality and therefore must be engaged with a lens of intersectionality. Understanding the positions of the Black women who fought to form this district to eliminate injustice and inequality in the educational system of our neighborhoods is a practice of history from below, giving honor and reclamation of the Black woman as rhetor and

activist in the contemporary post-segregation public sphere. The terms post-segregation, integration and desegregation each point to a variety of policies, social change movements, and legal boundaries. They may indicate instances where segregation existed as a matter of law or policy (de jure) or where it existed as a matter of culture and indirect enactment of laws or policies (de facto). Desegregation may be seen as the elimination of policies and practices that force separation while integration may be seen as the development of policies and practices that actively force the mixing of people from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. The iterations of post-segregation struggles can be found in every corner of American life including the armed forces, health care facilities, employment, and transportation. For the purposes of this study, I will focus specifically on rhetoric and activism in the face of identified de jure segregation in public housing and, in tandem, K-12 education.

Desegregation has gone down dilapidated. Many of the original settlements and consent decrees that sought to end de jure segregation of public schools and housing are criticized for creating even larger more insidious segregation problems and/or creating a sentiment of local distrust and wrongdoing that proved bureaucratically insurmountable (Welner). Programs and services put in place to end segregation collapsed under the weight of economic strife, were unable to win hearts and minds of people who resented federal change to their local community standards, and in some cases were even outright circumvented with new programs and services like tracking, gifted education protocols and zero tolerance behavioral standards. Much like the end of open legal slavery, loopholes opened, and new systems of oppression emerged. While these new systems sometimes managed to oppress Whites as well, they were built on racism and largely targeted African American students. And like rights of citizenship, the rejoicing for African-

American men's advancement was incomplete for African-American women who had to implore a union of suffrage, feminism and anti-racism in order to be heard.

This is a difficult rhetorical situation and calling for Black women. Many of us have grown up basking in images of Ruby Bridges being walked to school by federal marshals and the Little Rock nine bravely moving past shouting and spitting protesters. The notion that desegregation has failed, and we must return to the precipice of progress is daunting. From a constructive hermeneutic perspective, this begs a shift in consciousness and thoughts which then demands a shift in language and action (Gadamer). But how does one communicate something which she has developed consciousness of as a lived experience in systems like public education where the policies and direction of institutions are generally dictated by data; aggregated, de-identified, atomized and re-identified bits and pieces of who the humans in the give system are? How does one go from being a dot on a page or a number in a spreadsheet to being an important voice and member of a body moving toward a harmonious and equitable existence? This is not to suggest that data collection does not have its majesty (Tillotson) but instead to suggest that understanding the lived experience requires more; that it is the lived experience that moves us to a point of rejecting oppressive structural schemas embedded in everyday interactions; that those interactions occur in language and that it is communicative action (sometimes informed by data) that moves us from rejection to justice (Habermas). The problem is that, like the Henrietta Lacks story, this documenting and navigation of the lived experiences of Black women is often overlooked or mishandled. We need to include the lived experiences and empowerment processes of Black women in our investigation of the failures (or successes) of 21st-century desegregation. As this problem is rooted in language, history, communication, and layered identity, an intersectional, rhetorical and hermeneutic approach is a fitting response.

***Breaking Silence.*** In an effort to reclaim rhetorical space in the district, I am now breaking my own silence about the challenges we face. I am working on gathering spheres of us who work together on a daily basis to support this public resource. The following artifact is an illustration of this reclamation at work in an exchange I have had with an award winning school nurse who has been in my daughters' schools and lives since elementary school. I wrote the following open letter to her as a beginning point to start a reclaimed rhetorical intersectionality conversation in which the Lacks story, the legacies of the women who fought to establish the district, and my daughters' sense of ownership and pride in their educational home could grow.

Letter to Nurse W of The Woodland Hills School District Junior Senior High School

Dear Nurse W,

My own life has been one of intersectionality. This is a phenomenon in which poor or less-resourced women of color often find ourselves. Different structures, politics, and representation issues end up producing negative outcomes in our lives and those of our children because of layered social constructs surrounding our identity. Perhaps this metaphor will work, some diseases exacerbate others, right? If a person has HSV, she is particularly vulnerable to HIV and in turn an HIV infection means a host of other opportunistic infections unless she is under proper care for the condition. Intersectionality is a lot like this. Racial history in the United States predicts poverty for many African Americans and being a woman on top of that exposes one to a host of other issues. Some people experience these correlations because they are Latina/o. Some experience it because they are members of the LGBTQIA community. Some because they are members of a religious minority. The point is that normal marginalization becomes amplified. I was a single mother from a Muslim household with an income of about \$22k per year when I began my life of interactions with school districts and their personnel. I was poor, Black, female

and a member of a religious minority. The position in this intersection often placed me in situations where I had difficulty navigating social systems like education and healthcare. Eventually, I felt pressure to get married and live a respectable Muslim life. I did this and had two daughters from that union. Their father and I had a lot of interpersonal problems. How to raise our children was a source of constant argumentation and distress. In a typical Muslim family, the man makes decisions and women are expected to accept them. In my household, this was the case. This included healthcare decisions like immunizing the girls. I also knew of many African Americans who shared the concerns because of a history of unethical practice by medical professionals such as the Tuskegee experiment. As a woman and mother, I had also had some very frightening and confusing concerns about what to do to ensure the health of my, now three, daughters. There were claims of immunizations causing autism and other things to digest. I often felt conflicted at medical appointments for them. Ultimately, I worked with their doctor and made the decision to vaccinate my daughters. There were time when I felt it was best to hide this fact. I did not want to cause trouble in my household and I did not want to be ridiculed or judged as a bad mother. So, when it was time for them to go to school, I did not document their immunizations. I do not like to tell stories of victimhood because I am in such a much better place now but I will note that I believed and still believe it was a wise choice at the time. As you will see from the medical records attached here, I have had immunizations for my daughters dating back to the time of their birth. I was not always in a position to do them at each visit. That depended on who was with me or how I perceived my own power at the time. But, I tried. I tried because I had one thing going for me that I thought could save us - education. I knew to review things for myself. I knew to ask experts and I knew to trust that learning and research were worthwhile. With that education, I also had experiences. I had lived in Haiti for two years doing

an internship at The Albert Schweitzer Hospital, so unlike some of my friends and family, I knew first-hand what it was like to live in a community where vaccinations were not a given and I did not want my daughters to suffer the illnesses I had seen. So, I tried. Like most parents I know who are also in the intersection, I did the best I could with what I had and I tried to hold on to my cultural capital.

My marriage and cultural commitments shifted. I learned to be accountable to my own thoughts and feelings before trying to please others. This was a difficult time in my life and it was about the time that I met you. My daughters were attending Shaffer Elementary. I was divorced and planning to remarry. I moved myself, my daughters and my sick mother to a new home in Turtle Creek and life was changing rapidly. You were the nurse my youngest child looked to for comfort. I am sure you know that sometimes children will come to you and say they are sick when they are really just trying hard to cope with all kinds of tumultuous things going on. I wish this were not the case but I think it may have been true for my daughter. I remarried and my husband is a remarkable man who truly treats me as his partner. I worked hard to build a life of honesty and openness wherein my children could thrive. I stressed the importance of education and respect. I wanted to give them so much. I prayed and had faith.

Now the little girls are nearly grown. I am navigating the first years of high school for them and trying to make sure I give them the best transition to college and adult life possible. I hope the immunizations are understood as part of that effort. I am less afraid. I wrote you this letter to tell you my truth but also to honor the fact that I know there are other women raising children who go to Woodland Hills School District just doing the best they can to stand in the intersectional life and not get hit by anything. My hope is that my experience can shed a little light on what others may be going through and help with empathy. Empathy has always been a strong suit of

yours but even the strongest of us get tired some days or simply don't understand. Maybe this will help explain some of what it is like for parents like me. Regardless, I had to try because I know that intersectionality can also be a positive phenomenon and provide uplift.

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